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ASTOR, LENOX AND
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BOSTON

SMALL, MAYNARD AND COMPANY

MCMIX

THE WEB
OF THE
GOLDEN SPIDER

BY

FREDERICK ORIN BARTLETT

Author of "Joan of the Alley," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY

HARRISON FISHER

AND

CHARLES M. RELYEA

BOSTON

SMALL, MAYNARD AND COMPANY

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TO

MY WIFE

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With pretty art and a woman's instinctive desire to please, she had placed the candle on a chair and assumed something of a pose . . . . . *Frontispiece*

"For the love of God, do not rouse her. She sees! She sees!" 46

Minute after minute Stubbs stared at this sight in silence 278

Sorez stared straight ahead of him in a frenzy. Then the shadow sprang, throwing his arms about the tall figure 304

THE WEB OF THE GOLDEN SPIDER

CHAPTER I

The Closed Door Opens

IN his aimless wanderings around Boston that night Wilson passed the girl twice, and each time, though he caught only a glimpse of her lithe form bent against the whipping rain, the merest sketch of her somber features, he was distinctly conscious of the impress of her personality. As she was absorbed by the voracious horde which shuffled interminably and inexplicably up and down the street, he felt a sense of loss. The path before him seemed a bit less bright, the night a bit more barren. And although in the excitement of the eager life about him he quickly reacted, he did not turn a corner but he found himself peering beneath the lowered umbrellas with a piquant sense of hope.

Wilson's position was an unusual one for a theological student. He was wandering at large in a strange city, homeless and penniless, and yet he was not unhappy in this vagabondage. Every prowler in the dark is, consciously or unconsciously, a mystic. He is in touch with the unknown; he is a member of a universal

waiting.

felt, and something, too, of that fello
ıts between those who have no doors to
ɐm. For such stand shoulder to sho
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ıth behind the doors. To those in a
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' a man outside to walk up and down i
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h hat, Wilson was keenly alive to this.
ıted officer he passed affected him like
'usion. He brought home all the medi
ht, all the shrilling gray, all the hung

This was distintly a novel viewpoint for Wilson. As a student he had most sincerely approved of the Law; as a citizen of the world behind the closed doors he had forgotten it. Now with a trace of uneasiness he found himself resenting it.

A month ago Wilson had thought his life mapped out beyond the possibility of change, except in its details; he would finish his course at the school, receive a church, and pursue with moderate success his task of holding a parish up to certain ideals. The death of the uncle who was paying his way, following his bankruptcy, brought Wilson to a halt from even this slow pace. At first he had been stunned by this sudden order of Fate. His house-bleached fellows had gathered around in the small, whitewashed room where he had had so many tough struggles with Greek roots and his Hebrew grammar. They offered him sympathy and such slight aid as was theirs. Minor scholarships and certain drudging jobs had been open to him, — the opportunity to shoulder his way to the goal of what he had thought his manifest destiny. But that night after they had gone he locked the door, threw wide his window, and wandered among the stars. There was something in the unpathed purple between the spear points which called to him. He breathed a fresher air and thrilled to keener dreams. Strange faces came to him, smiling at him, speaking dumbly to him, stirring unknown depths within him. He was left breathless, straining towards them.

The day after the school term closed he had packed

his extension valise, bade good-bye to his pitying classmates, and taken the train to Boston. He had only an indefinite object in his mind: he had once met a friend of his uncle's who was in the publishing business; and he determined to seek him on the chance of securing through him work of some sort. He learned that the man had sold out and moved to the West. Then followed a week of hopeless search for work until his small hoard had dwindled away to nothing. To-day he found himself without a cent.

He had answered the last advertisement just as the thousand windows sprang to renewed life. It was a position as shipping clerk in a large department store. After waiting an hour to see the manager, a double-chinned ghoul with the eyes of a pig, he had been dismissed with a glance.

"Thank you," said Wilson.

"For what?" growled the man.

"For closing this door," answered Wilson, with a smile.

The fellow shifted the cigar stub which he gripped with yellow teeth between loose lips.

"What you mean?"

"Oh, you would n't understand — not in a thousand years. Good-day."

The store was dry and warm. He had wandered about it gazing at the pretty colored garments, entranced by the life and movement about him, until the big iron gates were closed. Then he went out upon the thoroughfare, glad to brush shoulders with the home-

goers, glad to feel one with them in the brilliant pageant of the living. And always he searched for the face he had met twice that day.

The lights glowed mellow in the mist and struck out shimmering golden bars on the asphalt. The song of shuffling feet and the accompaniment of the clattering hansoms rang excitedly in his ears. He felt that he was touching the points of a thousand quick romances. The flash of a smile, a quick step, were enough to make him press on eagerly in the possibility that it was here, perhaps, the loose end of his own life was to be taken up.

As the crowd thinned away and he became more conspicuous to the prowling eyes which seemed to challenge him, he took a path across the Public Gardens, and so reached the broader sweep of the avenue where the comfortable stone houses snuggle shoulder to shoulder. The lower windows were lighted behind drawn shades. Against the stubborn stone angles the light shone out with appealing warmth. Every window was like an invitation. Occasionally a door opened, emitting a path of yellow light to the dripping walk, framing for a second a man or a woman; sometimes a man and a woman. When they vanished the dark always seemed to settle down upon him more stubbornly.

Then as the clock boomed ten he saw her again. Through the mist he saw her making her uncertain way along the walk across the street, stopping every now and then to glance hesitatingly at the lighted windows, pause, and move on again. Suddenly, from the

shadow of the area way, Wilson saw an officer swoop down upon her like a hawk. The woman started back with a little cry as the officer placed his hand upon her arm. Wilson saw this through the mist like a shadow picture and then he crossed the road. As he approached them both looked up, the girl wistfully, the officer with an air of bravado. Wilson faced the vigorous form in the helmet and rubber overcoat.

"Well," growled the officer, "what you doin' round here?"

"Am I doing anything wrong?"

"That's wot I'm goneter find out. Yer've both been loafin' here fer an hour."

"No," answered Wilson, "I have n't been loafing."

"Wot yer doin' then?"

"Living."

Wilson caught an eager look from the shadowed face of the girl. He met the other eyes which peered viciously into his with frank aggressiveness. He never in his life had felt toward any fellow-creature as he felt towards this man. He could have reached for his throat. He drew his coat collar more closely about his neck and unbuttoned the lower buttons to give his legs freer play. The officer moved back a little, still retaining his grip on the girl's arm.

"Well,' he said, "yer better get outern here now, or I'll run you in, too."

"No," answered Wilson, "you'll not run in either of us."

"I won't, eh? Move on lively ——"

"You go to the devil," said Wilson, with quiet deliberation.

He saw the night stick swing for him, and, throwing his full weight against the officer, he lifted his arm and swung up under the chin. Then he seized the girl's hand.

"Run," he gasped, "run for all you're worth!"

They ran side by side and darted down the first turn. They heard the sharp oath, the command, and then the heavy beat of the steps behind them. Wilson kept the girl slightly ahead of him, pushing and steadying her, although he soon found that she was quite as fleet as he himself was. She ran easily, from the hips, like one who has been much out of doors.

Their breath came in gasps, but they still heard the heavy steps behind them and pushed on. As they turned another corner to the left they caught the sharp bark of a pistol and saw the spat of a bullet on the walk to the right of them. But this street was much darker, and so, while there was the added danger from stumbling, they felt safer.

"He's getting winded," shouted Wilson to her. "Keep on."

Soon they came to a blank wall, but to the left they discovered an alley. A whiff of salt air beat against their faces, and Wilson knew they were in the market road which led along the water front in the rear of the stone houses. He had come here from the park on hot days. There were but few lights, and these could not carry ten yards through the mist. Pressing on, he

ows. Finally the girl fell back

— you go on!" she begged.

ı drew her to his side and pressed back
ıe wooden doors, holding his breath t
l barely make out the sodden steps and
ding.

ıist beat in damply upon their faces, l
; feel it in the joy of their new-found f
hem all was black, the road indisting
below the pale lights which were scarce
pricks in black velvet. But the barrier
o thrust them out aggressively.

;ling to regain his breath, Wilson fo
ıning freer and his senses more alert t
The night surrounding him had sudde
friend. It became pregnant with new

trapped. He glanced at the girl huddling at his feet and then straightened himself.

"They sha'n't!" he cried. "They sha'n't!"

He ran his hand along the door to the latch. It was locked; but he drew back a few steps and threw his full weight against it and felt it give a trifle.

"They 'll hear us," warned the girl.

Though the impact jarred him till he felt dizzy, he stumbled forward again; and yet again. The lock gave and, thrusting the girl in, he swung the door to behind them.

They found themselves in a small, paved yard. Fumbling about this, Wilson discovered in the corner several pieces of joist, and these he propped against the door. Then he sank to the ground exhausted.

In spite of his bruised body, his tired legs, and aching head, he felt a flush of joy; he was no longer at bay. A stout barrier stood between him and his pursuers. And when he felt a warm, damp hand seeking his he closed over it with a new sense of victory. He was now not only a fighter, but a protector. He had not yet been able to see enough of the girl's features to form more than the vaguest conception of what she was. Yet she was not impersonal; he felt that he could have found her again in a crowd of ten thousand. She was a frailer creature who had come to him for aid.

He gripped her fingers firmly as the muffled sound of voices came to their ears. The officers had evidently passed and were now returning, balked in their search.

—— ...ply, they must have got over this
."

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t, an' there is n't a door wot is n't locke
no. I dunno. This wan here —— "
d the latch and shook the door, kickir
h his heavy boots.
Wilson had risen to his feet, armed wi
of the joist, his lips drawn back so tigh
is teeth. Wilson had never struck a ma
efore to-night, but he knew that if
he should batter until he could n't st
hit hard — mercilessly. He gripped
wood as though it were a two-han
nd waited.
mind now that it 's a bit loose?" s

his knee against it and shoved, but the j
The man did n't know that he was play

eyes at the tall figure of the waiting man at her side, drew a long breath and laid her hand upon his knee.

"They 've gone," she said.

Still he did not move, but stood alert, suspicious, his long fingers twined around his weapon, fearing with half-savage passion some new ruse.

"Don't stand so," she pleaded. "They 've gone."

The stick dropped from his hand, and he took off his hat to let the rain beat upon his hot head.

She crowded closer to his side, shivering with the cold, and yet more at peace than she had been that weary, long day. The world, which had stretched to fearsome distances, shrank again to the compass of this small yard, and a man stood between her and the gate to fight off the forces which had surged in upon her. She was mindful of nothing else. It was enough that she could stand for even a moment in the shelter of his strength; relax senses which discovered danger only to shrink back, powerless to ward it off. A woman without her man was as helpless as a soldier without his arms.

The rain soaked through to her skin, and she was faint with hunger; yet she was content to wait by his side in silence, in the full confidence that he with his man strength would stride over the seemingly impossible and provide. She was stripped to the naked woman heart of her, forced back to the sheer clinging instinct. She was simplified to the merely feminine as he was to the merely masculine. No other laws governed them but the crude necessity to live—in freedom.

Before them loomed the dripping wall, beyond that the road which led to the waiting fists, beyond that the wind-swept, gray waves; behind them rose the blank house with its darkened windows.

"Well," he said, "we must go inside."

He crossed the yard to one of the ground-floor windows and tried to raise it. As he expected, it was locked. He thrust his elbow through a pane just above the catch and raised it. He climbed in and told her to wait until he opened the door. It seemed an hour before he reappeared, framed in the dark entrance. He held out his hand to her.

"Come in," he bade her.

She obeyed, moving on tiptoe.

CHAPTER II

Chance Provides

FOR a moment after he had closed the door they stood side by side, she pressing close to him. She shivered the length of her slight frame. The hesitancy which had come to him with the first impress of the lightless silence about them vanished.

"Come," he said, taking her hand, "we must find a light and build a fire."

He groped his way back to the window and closed it, drawing the curtain tight down over it. Then he struck a match and held it above his head.

At the flash of light the girl dropped his hand and shrank back in sudden trepidation. So long as he remained in the shadows he had been to her only a power without any more definite personality than that of sex. Now that she was thrown into closer contact with him, by the mere curtailing of the distances around and above her, she was conscious of the need of further knowledge of the man. The very power which had defended her, unless in the control of a still higher power, might turn against her. The match flickered feebly in the damp air, revealing scantily a small room which looked like a laundry. It was enough, however,

ve his head, stepped towards her.
She saw eyes of light blue meeting her
te fearlessly. His lean face and the sl
r above it made an instant appeal to he
was a man she could trust within doo
had trusted him without. His fran
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to be strong and tender.
She realized that he in his turn was s
held up her head and faced him sturdi
ier drenched condition she did not lool
ggled, thanks to the simple linen suit sl
r jet black hair, loose and damp, fra
e which lacked color without appearin

situation weakening. The room appeared less chill, the vista beyond the doorway less formidable. Here was a good comrade for a long road — a girl to meet life with some spirit as it came along.

She looked up at him with a smile as she heard the drip of their clothes upon the floor.

"We ought to be hung up to dry," she laughed.

Lowering the candle, he stepped forward.

"We 'll be dry soon," he answered confidently. "What am I to call you, comrade?"

"My name is Jo Manning," she answered with a bit of confusion.

"And I am David Wilson," he said simply. "Now that we 've been introduced we 'll hunt for a place to get dry and warm."

He shivered.

"I am sure the house is empty. It *feels* empty. But even if it is n't, whoever is here will have to warm us or — fight!"

He held out his hand again and she took it as he led the way along the hall towards the front of the house. He moved cautiously, creeping along on tiptoe, the light held high above his head, pausing every now and then to listen. They reached the stairs leading to the upper hallway and mounted these. He pushed open the door, stopping to listen at every rusty creak, and stepped out upon the heavy carpet. The light roused shadows which flitted silently about the corners as in batlike fear. The air smelled heavy, and even the moist rustling of the girl's garments

sounded muffled. Wilson glanced at the wall, and at sight of the draped pictures pressed the girl's hand.

"Our first bit of luck," he whispered. "They *have* gone for the summer!"

They moved less cautiously now, but not until they reached the dining room and saw the covered chairs and drawn curtains did they feel fully assured. He thrust aside the portières and noted that the blinds were closed and the windows boarded. They could move quite safely now.

The mere sense of being under cover — of no longer feeling the beat of the rain upon them — was in itself a soul-satisfying relief. But there was still the dank cold of their soggy clothes against the body. They must have heat; and he moved on to the living rooms above. He pushed open a door and found himself in a large room of heavy oak, not draped like the others. He might have hesitated had it not been for the sight of a large fireplace directly facing him. When he saw that it was piled high with wood and coal ready to be lighted, he would have braved an army to reach it. Crossing the room, he thrust his candle into the kindling. The flames, as though surprised at being summoned, hesitated a second and then leaped hungrily to their meal. Wilson thrust his cold hands almost into the fire itself as he crouched over it.

"Come here," he called over his shoulder. "Get some of this quickly."

She huddled close to him and together they let their cold bodies drink in the warm air. It tingled at

their fingers, smarted into their faces, and stung their chests.

"Nearer! Nearer!" he urged her. "Let it burn into you."

Their garments sent out clouds of steam and sweated pools to the tiles at their feet; but still they bathed in the heat insatiably. He piled on wood until the flames crackled out of sight in the chimney and flared into the room. He took her by the shoulders and turned her round and round before it as one roasts a goose. He took her two hands and rubbed them briskly till they smarted; she laughed deliciously the while, and the color on her cheeks deepened. But in spite of all this they could n't get very far below the surface. He noticed the dripping fringe of her skirts and her water-logged shoes.

"This will never do," he said. "You 've got to get dry — clear to your bones. Somehow a woman does n't look right — wet. She gets so very wet — like a kitten. I 'm going foraging now. You keep turning round and round."

"Till I 'm brown on the outside?"

"Till I come back and see if you 're done."

She followed him with her eyes as he went out, and in less than five minutes she heard him calling for her. She hurried to the next room and found him bending over a tumbled heap of fluffy things which he had gingerly picked from the bureau drawers.

"Help yourself," he commanded, with a wave of his hand.

"But — I ought n't to take these things!"

"My girl," he answered in an even voice that seemed to steady her, "when it 's either these or pneumonia — it 's these. I 'll leave you the candle."

"But you ——"

"I 'll find something."

He went out. She stood bewildered in the midst of the dimly revealed luxury about her. The candle threw feeble rays into the dark corners of the big room, over the four-posted oak bed covered with its daintily monogrammed spread, over the heavy hangings at the windows, and the bright pictures on the walls. She caught a glimpse of closets, of a graceful dressing table, and finally saw her reflection in the long mirror which reached to the floor.

She held the candle over her head and stared at herself. She cut but a sorry figure in her own eyes in the midst of such spotless richness as now surrounded her. She shivered a little as her own damp clothes pressed clammily against her skin. Then with a flush she turned again to the garments rifled from their perfumed hiding places. They looked very white and crisp. She hesitated but a second.

"She 'll forgive," she whispered, and threw off her dripping waist. The clothes, almost without exception, fitted her remarkably well. She found herself dressing leisurely, enjoying to the fullest the feel of the rich goods. She shook her hair free, dried it as best she could, and took some pains to put it up nicely. It

was long and glossy black, but not inclined to curl. It coiled about her head in silken strands of dark richness.

She demurred at first at the silk dress which he had tossed upon the bed, but she could find no other. It was of a golden yellow, dainty and foreign in its design. It fitted snugly to her slim figure as though it had been made for her. She stood off at a little distance and studied herself in the mirror. She was a girl who had an instinct for dress which had never been satisfied; a girl who could give, as well as take, an air from her garments. She admired herself quite as frankly as though it had been some other person who, with head uptilted and teeth flashing in a contented smile, challenged her from the clear surface of the mirror, looking as though she had just stepped through the wall into the room. The cold, the wet, and for a moment even the hunger vanished, so that as she glanced back at her comfortable reflection it seemed as if it were all just a dream of cold and wet and hunger. With silk soothing her skin, with the crisp purity of spotless linen rustling about her, with the faultless gown falling in rich splendor about her feet, she felt so much a part of these new surroundings that it was as though she melted into them — blended her own personality with the unstinted luxury about her.

But her foot scuffled against a wet stocking lying as limp as water grass, which recalled her to herself and the man who had led the way to this. A wave of pity swept over her as she wondered if he had found dry

things for himself. She must hurry back and see that he was comfortable. She felt a certain pride that the beaded slippers she had found in the closet fitted her a bit loosely. With the candle held far out from her in one hand and the other lifting her dress from the floor, she rustled along the hall to the study, pausing there to speak his name.

"All ready?" he shouted.

He strode from a door to the left, but stopped in the middle of the room to study her as she stood framed in the doorway — a picture for Whistler. With pretty art and a woman's instinctive desire to please, she had placed the candle on a chair and assumed something of a pose. The mellow candle-light deepened the raven black of her hair, softened the tint of her gown until it appeared of almost transparent fineness. It melted the folds of the heavy crimson draperies by her side into one with the dark behind her. She had shyly dropped her eyes, but in the excitement of the moment she quickly raised them again. They sparkled with merriment at sight of his lean frame draped in a lounging robe of Oriental ornateness. It was of silk and embellished with gold-spun figures.

"It was either this," he apologized, "or a dress suit. If I had seen you first, I should have chosen the latter. I ought to dress for dinner, I suppose, even if there is n't any."

"You look as though you ought to make a dinner come out of those sleeves, just as the magicians make rabbits and gold-fish."

"*And you,*" he returned, "look as though you ought

to be able to get a dinner by merely summoning the butler."

He offered her his arm with exaggerated gallantry and escorted her to a chair by the fire. She seated herself and, thrusting out her toes towards the flames, gave herself up for a moment to the drowsy warmth. He shoved a large leather chair into place to the left and, facing her, enjoyed to himself the sensation of playing host to her hostess in this beautiful house. She looked up at him.

"I suppose you wonder what brought me out there?"

"In a general way — yes," he answered frankly. "But I don't wish you to feel under any obligation to tell me. I see you as you sit there, — that is enough."

"There is so little else," she replied. She hesitated, then added, "That is, that anyone seems to understand."

"You really had no place to which you could go for the night?"

"No. I am an utter stranger here. I came up this morning from Newburyport — that 's about forty miles. I lost my purse and my ticket, so you see I was quite helpless. I was afraid to ask anyone for help, and then — I hoped every minute that I might find my father."

"But I thought you knew no one here?"

"I don't. If Dad is here, it is quite by chance."

She looked again into his blue eyes and then back to the fire.

"It is wonderful how you came to me," she said.

"I saw you twice before."

"Once," she said, "was just beyond the Gardens."

"You noticed me?"

"Yes."

She leaned forward.

"Yes," she repeated, "I noticed you because of all the faces I had looked into since morning yours was the first I felt I could trust."

"Thank you."

"And now," she continued, "I feel as though you might even understand better than the others what my errand here to Boston was." She paused again, adding, "I should hate to have you think me silly."

She studied his face eagerly. His eyes showed interest; his mouth assured her of sympathy.

"Go on," he bade her.

To him she was like someone he had known before — like one of those vague women he used to see between the stars. Within even these last few minutes he had gotten over the strangeness of her being here. He did not think of this building as a house, of this room as part of a home; it was just a cave opening from the roadside into which they had fled to escape the rain.

It seemed difficult for her to begin. Now that she had determined to tell him she was anxious for him to see clearly.

"I ought to go back," she faltered; "back a long way into my life, and I 'm afraid that won't be interesting to you."

"You can't go very far back," he laughed. Then

he added seriously, " I am really interested. Please to tell it in your own way."

" Well, to begin with, Dad was a sea captain and he married the very best woman in the world. But she died when I was very young. It was after this that Dad took me on his long voyages with him, — to South America, to India, and Africa. I don't remember much about it, except as a series of pictures. I know I had the best of times for somehow I can remember better how I felt than what I saw. I used to play on the deck in the sun and listen to the sailors who told me strange stories. Then when we reached a port Dad used to take me by the hand and lead me through queer, crooked little streets and show me the shops and buy whole armfuls of things for me. I remember it all just as you remember brightly colored pictures of cities — pointed spires in the sunlight, streets full of bright colors, and dozens of odd men and women whose faces come at night and are forgotten in the morning. Dad was big and handsome and very proud of me. He used to like to show me off and take me with him everywhere. Those years were very wonderful and beautiful.

" Then one day he brought me back to shore again, and for a while we lived together in a large white house within sight of the ocean. We used to take long walks and sometimes went to town, but he did n't seem very happy. One day he brought home with him a strange woman and told me that she was to be housekeeper, and that I must obey her and grow up to be a fine

woman. Then he went away. That was fifteen years ago. Then came the report he was dead; that was ten years ago. After a while I did n't mind so much, for I used to lie on my back and recall all the places we had been together. When these pictures began to fade a little, I learned another way, — a way taught me by a sailor. I took a round crystal I found in the parlor and I looked into it hard, — oh, very, very hard. Then it happened. First all I saw was a blur of colors, but in a little while these separated and I saw as clearly as at first all the streets and places I had ever visited, and sometimes others too. Oh, it was such a comfort! Was that wrong?"

"No," he answered slowly, "I can't see anything wrong in that."

"She — the housekeeper — called it wicked — devilish. She took away the crystal. But after a while I found I could see with other things — even with just a glass of clear water. All you have to do is to hold your eyes very still and stare and stare. Do you understand?"

He nodded.

"I 've heard of that."

She dropped her voice, evidently struggling with growing excitement, colored with something of fear.

"Don't you see how close this kept me to Dad? I 've been living with him almost as though I were really with him. We 've taken over again the old walks and many news ones. This seemed to go on just the same after we received word that he had

died — stricken with a fever in South America somewhere."

She paused, taking a quick breath.

"All that is not so strange," she ran on; "but yesterday — yesterday in the crystal I saw him — here in Boston."

"What!"

"As clearly as I see you. He was walking down a street near the Gardens."

"It might have been someone who resembled him."

"No, it was Dad. He was thinner and looked strange, but I knew him as though it were only yesterday that he had gone away."

"But if he is dead ——"

"He is n't dead," she answered with conviction.

"On the strength of that vision you came here to look for him?"

"Yes."

"When you believe, you believe hard, don't you?"

"I believe the crystal," she answered soberly.

"Yet you did n't find your father?"

"No," she admitted.

"You are still sure he is here?"

"I am still sure he is living. I may have made a mistake in the place, but I know he is alive and well somewhere. I shall look again in the crystal to-morrow."

"Yes, to-morrow," answered Wilson, vaguely.

He rose to his feet.

"But there is still the hunger of to-day."

She seemed disappointed in the lightness with which apparently he took her search.

"You don't believe?"

"I believe you. And I believe that you believe. But I have seen little of such things myself. In the meanwhile it would be good to eat — if only a few crackers. Are you afraid to stay here alone while I explore a bit?"

She shook her head.

He was gone some ten minutes, and when he came back his loose robe bulged suspiciously in many places.

"Madame," he exclaimed, "I beg you to observe me closely. I snap my fingers twice, — so! Then I motion, — so! Behold!"

He deftly extricated from one of the large sleeves a can of soup, and held it triumphantly aloft.

"Once more, — so!"

He produced a package of crackers; next a can of coffee, next some sugar. And she, watching him with face alight, applauded vigorously and with more genuine emotion than usually greets the acts of a prestidigitator.

"But, oh!" she exclaimed, with her hands clasped beneath her chin, "don't you dare to make them disappear again!"

"Madame," answered Wilson, with a bow, "that shall be your privilege."

He hurried below once more, and this time returned with a chafing-dish, two bowls, and a couple of iron spoons which he had found in the kitchen. In ten

minutes the girl had prepared a lunch which to them was the culmination of their happiness. Warmed, clothed, and fed, there seemed nothing left for them.

When they had finished and had made everything tidy in the room, and he had gone to the cellar and replenished the coal-hod, he told her something of his own life. For a little while she listened, but soon the room became blurred to her and she sank farther and farther among the heavy shadows and the old paintings on the wall. The rain beat against the muffled windows drowsily. The fire warmed her brow like some hypnotic hand. Then his voice ceased and she drew her feet beneath her and slept in the chair, looking like a soft Persian kitten.

CHAPTER III

A Stranger Arrives

IT was almost two in the morning when Wilson heard the sound of wheels in the street without, and conceived the fear that they had stopped before the house. He found himself sitting rigidly upright in the room which had grown chill, staring at the dark doorway. The fire had burned low and the girl still slept in the shadows, her cheeks pressed against her hands. He listened with suspended breath. For a moment there was no other sound and so he regained his composure, concluding it had been only an evil dream. Crossing to the next room, he drew a blanket from the little bed and wrapped the sleeping girl about with it so carefully that she did not awake. Then he gently poked up the fire and put on more coal, taking each lump in his fingers so as to make no noise.

Her face, even while she slept, seemed to lose but little of its animation. The long lashes swept her flushed cheeks. The eyes, though closed, still remained expressive. A smile fluttered about her mouth as though her dreams were very pleasant. To Wilson, who neither had a sister nor as a boy or man had been much among women, the sight of this sleeping girl so near to him was particularly impressive. Her utter

trust and confidence in his protection stirred within him another side of the man who had stood by the gate clutching his club like a savage. She looked so warm and tender a thing that he felt his heart growing big with a certain feeling of paternity. He knew at that moment how the father must have felt when, with the warm little hand within his own, he had strode down those foreign streets conscious that every right-hearted man would turn to look at the pretty girl; with what joy he had stopped at strange bazaars to watch her eyes brighten as the shopkeepers did their best to please. Those must have been days which the father, if alive, was glad to remember.

A muffled beat as upon the steps without again brought him to attention, but again the silence closed in upon it until he doubted whether he had truly heard. But the dark had become alive now, and he seemed to see strange, moving shadows in the corners and hear creakings and rustlings all about him. He turned sharply at a soft tread behind him only to start at the snapping of a coal in the fire from the other side. Finally, in order to ease his mind, he crossed the room and looked beyond the curtains into the darkness of the hall. There was neither movement nor sound. He ventured out and peered down the staircase into the dark chasm marking the lower hall. He heard distinctly the sound of a key being fitted rather clumsily into the lock, then an inrush of air as the door was thrown open and someone entered, clutching at the wall as though unable to stand.

It never occurred to Wilson to do the natural and obviously simple thing: awake the girl at once and steal down the stairs in the rear until he at least should have a chance to reconnoitre. It seemed necessary for him to meet the situation face to face, to stand his ground as though this were an intrusion upon his own domain. The girl in the next room was sleeping soundly in perfect faith that he would meet every danger that should approach her. And so, by the Lord, he would. Neither she nor he were thieves or cowards, and he refused to allow her to be placed for a minute in such a position.

Someone followed close behind the first man who had entered and lighted a match. As the light flashed, Wilson caught a glimpse of two men; one tall and angular, the other short and broad-shouldered.

"The — the lights are n't on, cabby," said one of them; "but I — I can find my way all right."

"The divil ye can, beggin' yer pardon," answered the other. "I 'll jist go ahead of ye now an' ——"

"No, cabby, I don't need help."

"Jist to th' top of the shtairs, sor. I know ye 're thot weak with sickness ——"

The answer came like a military command, though in a voice heavy with weariness.

"Light a candle, if you can find one, and — go."

The cabby struck another match and applied it to a bit of candle he found on a hall table. As the light dissolved the dark, Wilson saw the taller man straighten before the anxious gaze of the driver.

"Sacré, are you going?" exclaimed the stranger, impatiently.

"Good night, sor."

"Good night." The words were uttered like a command.

The man went out slowly and reluctantly closed the door behind him. The echo pounded suddenly in the distance.

No sooner was the door closed than the man remaining slumped like an empty grain-sack and only prevented himself from falling by a wild clutch at the bannister. He raised himself with an effort, the candle drooping sidewise in his hand. His broad shoulders sagged until his chin almost rested upon his breast and his big slouch hat slopped down over his eyes. His breathing was slow and labored, each breath being delayed as long as possible as though it were accompanied by severe pain. It was clear that only the domination of an extraordinary will enabled the man to keep his feet at all.

The stranger began a struggle for the mastery of the stairs that held Wilson spellbound. Each advance marked a victory worthy of a battlefield. But at each step he was forced to pause and rally all his forces before he went on to the next. First he would twine his long fingers about the rail reaching up as far as he was able; then he would lift one limp leg and swing it to the stair above; he would then heave himself forward almost upon his face and drag the other leg to a level with the first, rouse himself as from a tend-

felt nor saw anything. Every
focus on the exertion of the nex

Wilson had plenty of time to
face was shaven save for an iron-
was cropped in a straight line f
mouth to another. His eyes wer
shaggy brows. Across one cheel
of an old sabre wound. There w
him from his head to feet;
to which his hat tumbled, to
braced far back even when the res
and to his feet which he moved a
swing of a scabbard. A militar
from his shoulders. All these
traced in Wilson's mind as he wa

The last ten steps marked a str
Wilson, at the top, found his br
sheer agony of sympathy, and he
with each forward heave as they

up the last stair, seeming here to gain new strength for he held his head higher and grasped the candle more firmly. It was then that Wilson stepped into the radius of shallow light. But before he had time to speak, he saw the eyes raised swiftly to his, saw a quick movement of the hand, and then, as the candle dropped and was smothered out in the carpet, he was blinded and deafened by the report of a pistol almost in his face.

He fell back against the wall. He was unhurt, but he was for the moment stunned into inactivity by the unexpectedness of the assault. He stood motionless, smothering his breathing, alert to spring at the first sound. And he knew that the other was waiting for the first indication of his position to shoot again. So two, three seconds passed, Wilson feeling with the increasing tension as though an iron band were being tightened about his head. The house seemed to settle into deeper and deeper silence as though it were being enfolded in layer upon layer of felt. The dark about him quivered. Then he heard her voice, — the startled cry of an awakened child.

He sprang across the hall and through the curtains to her side. She was standing facing the door, her eyes frightened with the sudden awakening.

"Oh," she trembled, "what is it?"

He placed his fingers to her lips and drew her to one side, out of range of the door.

She snuggled closer to him and placed her hand upon his arm.

front of her. Then the silence
once again. A bit of coal kindled
out blue and yellow flames with
shadows danced upon the wall.
oblong entrance hung limp and
For aught they showed there mig
eyes behind them leering in; t
weapons pricking through; the
revolvers ready to bark death. Ea
them to open — to unmask. Th
racking. And behind him the
"What is it? Tell me." He fe
shoulders.

"Hush! Listen!"

From beyond the curtains c
muffled groan.

"Someone 's hurt," whispered

"Don't move. It 's only a r

They listened once more, and

There was no other reply but that spasmodic intake of breath, the jerky outlet through loose lips.

He crossed the room and lighted the bit of remaining candle. With this held above his head, he parted the curtains and peered out. The stranger was sitting upright against the wall, his head fallen sideways and the revolver held loosely in his limp fingers. As Wilson crossed to his side, he heard the girl at his heels.

"He 's hurt," she exclaimed.

Stooping quickly, Wilson snatched the weapon from the nerveless fingers. It was quite unnecessary. The man showed not the slightest trace of consciousness. His face was ashen gray. Wilson threw back the man's coat and found the under linen to be stained with blood. He tore aside the shirt and discovered its source — a narrow slit just over the heart. There was but one thing to do — get the man into the next room to the fire and, if possible, staunch the wound. He placed his hands beneath the stranger's shoulders and half dragged him to the rug before the flames. The girl, cheeks flushed with excitement, followed as though fearing to let him out of her sight.

Under the influence of the heat the man seemed to revive a bit — enough to ask for brandy and direct Wilson to a recess in the wall which served as a wine closet. After swallowing a stiff drink, he regained his voice.

"Who the devil ——" he began. But he was checked by a twitch in his side. He was evidently

uncertain whether he was in the hands of enemies or not. Wilson bent over him.

"Are you badly hurt? Do you wish me to send for a surgeon?"

"Go into the next room and bring me the leather chest you 'll find there."

Wilson obeyed. The man opened it and took out a vial of catgut, a roll of antiseptic gauze, several rolls of bandages, and — a small, pearl-handled revolver. He levelled this at Wilson.

"Now," he commanded, "tell me who the Devil you are."

Wilson did not flinch.

"Put it down," he suggested. "There is time enough for questions later. Your wound ought to be attended to. Tell me what to do."

The man's eyes narrowed, but his hand dropped to his side. He realized that he was quite helpless and that to shoot the intruder would serve him but little. By far the more sensible thing to do was to use him. Wilson, watching him, ready to spring, saw the question decided in the prostrate man's mind. The latter spoke sharply.

"Take one of those surgical needles and put it in the candle flame."

Wilson obeyed and, as soon as it was sterilized, further followed his instructions and sewed up the wound and dressed it. During this process the stranger showed neither by exclamation nor facial expression that he felt in the slightest what must have been ex-

cruciating pain. At the conclusion of the operation the man sprinkled a few pellets into the palm of his hand and swallowed them. For a few minutes after this he remained very quiet.

Wilson glanced up at the girl. She had turned her back upon the two men and was staring into the flames. She was not crying, but her two tightly clenched fists held closely jammed against her cheeks showed that she was keeping control of herself by an effort. It seemed to Wilson that it was clearly his duty to get her out of this at once. But where could he take her?

The stranger suddenly made an effort to struggle to his feet. He had grasped his weapon once again and now held it aggressively pointed at Wilson.

"What 's the matter with you?" demanded Wilson, quietly stepping forward.

"Matter?" stammered the stranger. "To come into your house and — and ——" he pressed his hand to his side and was forced to put out an arm to Wilson for support.

"I tell you we mean you no harm. We are n't thieves or thugs. We were driven in here by the rain."

"But how ——"

"By a window in the rear. Let us stay here until morning — it is too late for the girl to go out — and you 'll be none the worse."

Wilson saw the same hard, determined look that he had noted upon the stairs return to the gray eyes. It was clear that the man's whole nature bade him resent

this intrusion. It was evident that he regarded the two with suspicion, although at sight of the girl, who had turned, this was abated somewhat.

"How long have you been here?" he demanded.

"Some three or four hours."

"Are — are there any more of you?"

"No."

"Has — has there been any call for me while you have been in the house?"

"No."

He staggered a little and Wilson suggested that he lie down once more. But he refused and, still retaining his grip on the revolver, he bade Wilson lead him to the door of the next room and leave him. He was gone some fifteen minutes. Once Wilson thought he caught the clicking as of a safe being opened. The girl, who had remained in the background all this while, now crossed to Wilson's side as he stood waiting in the doorway. He glanced up at her. In her light silk gown she looked almost ethereal and added to the ghostliness of the scene. She was to him the one thing which lifted the situation out of the realm of sheer grim tragedy to piquant adventure from which a hundred lanes led into the unknown.

She pressed close to his side as though shrinking from the silence behind her. He reached out and took her hand. She smiled up at him and together they turned their eyes once again into the dark of the room beyond. Save for the intermittent clicking, there was silence. In this silence they seemed

to grow into much closer comradeship, each minute knitting them together as, ordinarily, only months could do.

Suddenly there was a cessation of the clicking and quickly following this the sound of a falling body. Wilson had half expected some such climax. Seizing a candle from the table before the fire, he rushed in. The stranger had fallen to the floor and lay unconscious in front of his safe.

A quick glance about convinced Wilson that the man had not been assaulted, but had only fainted, probably from weakness. His pulse was beating feebly and his face was ashen. Wilson stooped to place his hands upon his shoulders, when he caught sight of that which had doubtless led the stranger to undertake the strain of opening the safe — a black ebony box, from which protruded through the opened cover the golden head of a small, quaint image peering out like some fat spider from its web. In falling the head had snapped open so that from the interior of the thing a tiny roll of parchment had slipped out. Wilson, picking this up, put it in his pocket with scarcely other thought than that it might get lost if left on the floor. Then he took the still unconscious man in his arms and dragged him back to the fire.

FOR a while the man on the
rambled on as in a delirium.
"Ah, Dios!" he muttered. '
every hand." Then followed an
of phrases, but out of them the tw
"Millions upon millions in jewel
"But the God is silent. His li
blood of the twenty."

After this the thick tongue stum
like "Guadiva," and a little lat
troubled dreams to be struggling
for he complained of the stones w
Wilson managed to pour a spoon
his throat and to rebandage the
begun to bleed again. It was clear
ing from great weakness due to l

be such that their only safety would lie in flight. To the law they were already fugitives and consequently to be suspected of anything from petty larceny to murder.

To have forced himself to the safe with all the pain which walking caused him, the wounded man must have been impelled by some strong and unusual motive. It could n't be that he had suspected Wilson and Jo of theft, because, in the first place, he must have seen at a glance that the safe was undisturbed; and in the second, that they had not taken advantage of their opportunity for flight. It must have been something in connection with this odd-looking image, then, at which he had been so eager to look. Wilson returned to the next room. He picked the idol from the floor. As he did so the head snapped back into place. He brought it out into the firelight.

It looked like one of a hundred pictures he had seen of just such curiosities — like the junk which clutters the windows of curio dealers. The figure sat cross-legged with its heavy hands folded in its lap. The face was flat and coarse, the lips thick, the nose squat and ugly. Its carved headdress was of an Aztec pattern. The cheek-bones were high, and the chin thick and receding. The girl pressed close to his side as he held the thing in his lap with an odd mixture of interest and fear.

"Are n't its eyes odd?" she exclaimed instantly.

They consisted of two polished stones as clear as

upon a mausoleum than a living n
she was trying to guess the relat
two. She had seen many such
upon her foreign journeys with
him back strongly to her. She
image and, attracted by the gli
it into her own lap.

Wilson watched her closely.
monition of danger — a feeling t
be better if the girl had not seen
put out his hand to take it awa
arrested by the look of eagerness
her face. Her cheeks had taken o
came faster, and her whole fran
citement.

" Better give the thing back to n
He placed one hand upon it but s

" Come," he insisted, " I 'll tal
found it."

more beautiful to him than she did at that moment. He felt a wave of tenderness for her sweep over him. She was such a young-looking girl to be here alone at the mercy of two men. At this moment she looked so ridiculously like a little girl deprived of her doll that he was inclined to give it back to her again with a laugh. But he paused. She did not seem to be wholly herself. It was clear enough that the image had produced some very distinct impression upon her — whether of a nature akin to her crystal gazing he could not tell, although he suspected something of the sort. The wounded man still lay prone upon the rug before the fire. His muttering had ceased and his breathing seemed more regular.

"Please," trembled the girl. "Please to let me take it again."

"Why do you wish it?"

"Oh, I — I can't tell you, but ——"

She closed her lips tightly as though to check herself.

"I don't believe it is good for you," he said tenderly. "It seems to cast a sort of spell over you."

"I know what it is! I know if I look deep into those eyes I shall see my father. I feel that he is very near, somehow. I must look! I must!"

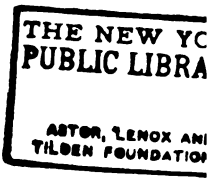
She took it from his hands once more and he let it go. He was curious to see how much truth there was in her impression and he felt that he could take the idol from her at any time it seemed advisable to do so. In the face of this new situation both of them lost interest in the wounded man. He lay as though asleep.

The girl seated herself Turk fashion upon the rug before the grate and, holding the golden figure in her lap, gazed down into the sparkling stones which served for eyes. The light played upon the dull, raw gold, throwing flickering shadows over its face. The thing seemed to absorb the light growing warmer through it.

Wilson leaned forward to watch her with renewed interest. The contrast between the tiny, ugly features of the image and the fresh, palpitating face of the girl made an odd picture. As she sat so, the lifeless eyes staring back at her with piercing insistence, it looked for a moment like a silent contest between the two. She commanded and the image challenged. A quickening glow suffused her neck and the color crept to her cheeks. To Wilson it was as though she radiated drowsy waves of warmth. With his eyes closed he would have said that he had come to within a few inches of her, was looking at the thing almost cheek to cheek with her. The room grew tense and silent. Her eyes continued to brighten until it seemed as though they reflected every dancing flame in the fire before her. Still the color deepened in her cheeks until they grew to a rich carmine.

Wilson found himself leaning forward with quickening breath. She seemed drifting further and further away from him and he sat fixed as though in some trance. He noted the rhythmic heave of her bosom and the full pulsation at the throat. The velvet sheen of the hair at her temples caught new lights from the

"For the love of God, do not rouse her. She sees! She sees!"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flames before her and held his eyes like the dazzling spaces between the coals. Her lips moved, but she spoke no word. Then it was that, seized with a nameless fear for the girl, Wilson rose half way to his feet. He was checked by a command from the man upon the floor.

"For the love of God, do not rouse her. She sees! She sees!"

The stranger struggled to his elbow and then to his knees, where he remained staring intently at the girl, with eyes aglow. Then the girl herself spoke.

"The lake! The lake!" she cried.

Wilson stepped to her side. He placed a hand firmly upon her shoulder.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

She lifted eyes as inscrutable as those of the image. They were slow moving and stared as blankly at him as at the pictures on the wall. He bent closer.

"Comrade — comrade — are you all right?"

Her lips moved to faint, incoherent mutterings. She did not seem to be in pain, and yet in travail of some sort.

The stranger, pale, his forehead beaded with the excitement of the moment, had tottered to his feet. He seized Wilson's arm almost roughly.

"Let her alone!" he commanded. "Can't you see? Dios! the image speaks!"

"The image? have you gone mad?"

"No! No!" he ran on excitedly. "Listen!"

The girl's brow was knitted. Her arms and limbs

before he heard the voice of the stra

"Touch that and I shoot."

The voice was cold and steady. H
saw that the man had regained his we
that held it was steady, the eyes bac
For one moment Wilson considered th
springing for him. But he regained
ciently to realize that he would only i
Even a wounded man is not to be t
holding a thirty-two caliber revolve

"Step back!"

Wilson obeyed.

"Farther!"

He retreated almost to the door int
From that moment his eyes never left
held the weapon. He watched it for
unsteadiness, for the first evidence
abstraction. He measured the distanc

had so strangely fallen. It was also clear to him that it did the girl no good to lose herself in such a trance as this. The troubled expression of her face, the piteous cry in her voice, her restlessness convinced him of this. When she had spoken to him of crystal gazing, he had thought of it only as a harmless amusement such as the Ouija board. This seemed different, more serious, either owing to the surroundings or to some really baneful influence from this thing of gold. And the responsibility of it was his; it was he who had led the girl in here, it was even he who had placed the image in her hands. At the fret of being forced to stand there powerless, the moisture gathered on his brow.

The stranger knelt on one knee by the girl's side, facing the door and Wilson. He placed one hand upon her brow and spoke to her in an even tone that seemed to steady her thoughts. Her words became more distinct.

"Look deep," he commanded. "Look deep and the mists will clear. Look deep. Look deep."

His voice was the rhythmic monotone used to lull a patient into a hypnotic trance. The girl responded quickly. The troubled expression left her face, her breathing became deeper, and she spoke more distinctly. Her eyes were still upon those of the image as though the latter had caught and held them. She looked more herself, save for the fact that she appeared to be even farther away in her thoughts than when in normal sleep.

"Let the image speak through you," ran on the stranger. "Tell me what you see or hear."

"The lake — it is very blue."

"Look again."

"I see mountains about the lake — very high mountains."

"Yes."

"One is very much higher than the others."

"Yes! Yes!"

"The trees reach from the lake halfway up its sides."

"Go on!" he cried excitedly.

"There they stop and the mountain rises to a point."

"Go on!"

"To the right there is a large crevice."

The stranger moistened his lips. He gave a swift glance at Wilson and then turned his gaze to the girl.

"See, we will take a raft and go upon the lake. Now look — look hard below the waters."

The girl appeared troubled at this. Her feet twitched and she threw back her head as though for more air. Once more Wilson calculated the distance between himself and that which stood for death. He found it still levelled steadily. To jump would be only to fall halfway, and yet his throat was beginning to ache with the strain. He felt within him some newborn instinct impelling him to her side. She stood somehow for something more than merely a fellow-creature in danger. He took a quicker interest in

her — an interest expressing itself now in a sense of infinite tenderness. He resented the fact that she was being led away from him into paths he could not follow — that she was at the beck of this lean, cold-eyed stranger and his heathenish idol.

"Below the waters. Look! Look!"

"No! No!" she cried.

"The shrine is there. Seek it! Seek it!"

He forced the words through his teeth in his concentrated effort to drive them into the girl's brain in the form of a command. But for some reason she rebelled at doing this. It was as though to go below the waters even in this condition choked her until she must gasp for breath. It was evidently some secret which lay there — the location of some shrine or hiding place which he most desired to locate through her while in this psychic state, for he insisted upon this while she struggled against it. Her head was lifted now as though, before finally driven to take the plunge, she sought aid — not from anyone here in the room, but from someone upon the borders of the lake where, in her trance, she now stood. And it came. Her face brightened — her whole body throbbed with renewed life. She threw out her hand with a cry which startled both men.

"Father! Father!"

The wounded man, puzzled, drew back leaving for a moment the other unguarded. Wilson sprang, and in three bounds was across the room. He struck up the arm just as a finger pressed the trigger. The

over and over again the glad cry of '

Wilson stooped and repeated her
no response. He rubbed her foreh
hands. Still she sat there scarcely
image. Wilson turned upon the
fists doubled up.

"Rouse her!" he cried. "Rouse
you!"

The man made his feet and stag
side.

"Awake!" he commanded intens

The eyes instantly responded.
a mist slowly faded from before
layer, as fog rises from a lake in t
mouth relaxed and expression return
When at length she became aware of
she looked like an awakened chil
fingers to her heavy eyes, she gla
about her. She

"Father!" she exclaimed timidly. "Are you here, father?"

Wilson took her arm gently but firmly.

"Your father is not here, comrade. He has not been here. You — you drowsed a bit, I guess."

She caught sight of the image on the floor and instantly understood. She passed her hands over her eyes in an effort to recall what she had seen.

"I remember — I remember," she faltered. "I was in some foreign land — some strange place — and I saw — I saw my father."

She looked puzzled.

"That is odd, because it was *here* that I saw him yesterday."

Her lips were dry and she asked Wilson for a glass of water. A pitcher stood upon the table, which he had brought up with the other things. When she had moistened her lips, she sat down again still a bit stupid. The wounded man spoke.

"My dear," he said, "what you have just seen through the medium of that image interests me more than I can tell you. It may be that I can be of some help to you. My name is Sorez — and I know well that country which you have just seen. It is many thousand miles from here."

"As far as the land of dreams," interrupted Wilson. "I think the girl has been worried enough by such nonsense."

"You spoke of your father," continued Sorez, ignoring the outburst. "Has he ever visited South America?"

"Many times. He was a sea captain, but he has not been home for years now."

"Ah, Dios!" exclaimed Sorez, "I understand now why you saw so clearly."

"You know my father — you have seen him?"

He waived her question aside impatiently. His strength was failing him again and he seemed anxious to say what he had to say before he was unable.

"Listen!" he began, fighting hard to preserve his consciousness. "You have a power that will lead you to much. This image here has spoken through you. He has a secret worth millions and ——"

"But my father," pleaded the girl, with a tremor in her voice. "Can it help me to him?"

"Yes! Yes! But do not leave me. Be patient. The priest — the priest is close by. He — he did this," placing his hand over the wound, "and I fear he — he may come again."

He staggered back a pace and stared in terror about him.

"I am not afraid of most things," he apologized, "but that devil he is everywhere. He might be ——"

There was a sound in the hall below. Sorez placed his hand to his heart again and staggered back with a piteous appeal to Wilson.

"The image! The image!" he gasped. "For the love of God, do not let him get it."

Then he sank in a faint to the floor.

Wilson looked at the girl. He saw her stoop for the revolver. She thrust it in his hand.

CHAPTER V

In the Dark

WILSON made his way into the hall and peered down the dark stairs. He listened; all was silent. A dozen perfectly simple accidents might have caused the sound the three had heard; and yet, although he had not made up his mind that the stranger's whole story was not the fabric of delirium, he had an uncomfortable feeling that someone really was below. Neither seeing nor hearing, he knew by some sixth sense that another human being stood within a few yards of him waiting. Who that human being was, what he wished, what he was willing to venture was a mystery. Sorez had spoken of the priest — the man who had stabbed him — but it seemed scarcely probable that after such an act as that a man would break into his victim's house, where the chances were that he was guarded, and make a second attempt. Then he recalled that Sorez was apparently living alone here and that doubtless this was known to the mysterious priest. If the golden image were the object of his attack, truly it must have some extraordinary value outside its own intrinsic worth. If of solid gold it could be worth but a few

hundred dollars. It must, then, be of value because of such power as it had exercised over the girl.

There was not so much as a creak on the floor below, and still his conviction remained that someone stood there gazing up as he was staring down. If only the house were lighted! To go back and get the candle would be to make a target of himself for anyone determined in his mission, but he must solve this mystery. The girl expected it of him and he was ready to sacrifice his life rather than to stand poorly in her eyes. He paused at this thought. Until it came to him at that moment, in that form, he had not realized anything of the sort. He had not realized that she was any more to him now than she had ever been — yet she had impelled him to do an unusual thing from the first. Yes, he had done for her what he would have done for no other living woman. He had helped her out of the clutches of the law, he had been willing to strike down an officer if it had been necessary, he had broken into a house for her, and now he was willing to risk his life. The thought brought him joy. He smiled, standing there in the dark at the head of the stairs, that he had in life this new impulse — this new propelling force. Then he slid his foot forward and stepped down the first stair.

He still had strongly that sense of being watched, but there was no movement below to indicate that this was anything more than a fancy. Not a sound came from the room he had just left. Evidently the girl

was waiting breathlessly for his return. He must delay no longer. He moved on, planning to try the front door and then to examine the window by which he himself had entered. These were the only two possible entrances to the house; the other windows were beyond the reach of anyone without a ladder and were tightly boarded in addition. He found the front door fast locked. It had a patent lock so that the chance of anyone having opened and closed it again was slight. He breathed more easily.

Groping along the hallway he was vividly reminded of the time a few hours past when the girl had placed her hand within his. It seemed to him that he now felt the warmth of it — thrilled to the velvet softness of it — more than he had at the time. He was full of illusions, excited by all the unusual happenings, and now, as he felt his way along the dark passage, he could have sworn that her fingers still rested upon his. It made him restless to get back to her. He should not have left her behind alone and unprotected. It was very possible that this swoon of Sorez' was but a ruse. He must hurry on about his investigation. He descended to the lower floor and groped to the laundry. It was still dark; the earth would not be lighted for another hour. He neither heard nor saw anything here. But when he reached the window by which he himself had entered but which he had closed behind him, he gave a start — it was wide open. It told him of another's presence in this house as plainly as if he had seen the person. There was of course one

chance in a hundred that the intruder had become frightened and taken to his heels. Wilson turned back with fresh fear for the girl whom he had been forced to leave behind unprotected. If it was true, as the terrified Sorez had feared, that the priest, whoever this mysterious and unscrupulous person might be, had returned to the assault, there certainly was good cause to fear for the safety of the girl. A man so fanatically inspired as to be willing to commit murder for the sake of an idol must be half mad. The danger was that the girl, in the belief which quite evidently now possessed her — that this golden thing held the key to her father's whereabouts — might attempt to protect or conceal it. He stumbled up the dark stairs and fell flat against the door. It was closed. He tried the knob; the door was locked. For a moment Wilson could not believe. It was as though in a second he had found himself thrust utterly out of the house. His first suspicion flew to Sorez, but he put this from his mind instantly. There was no acting possible in that man's condition; he was too weak to get down the stairs. But this was no common thief who had done this, for a thief, once realizing a household is awakened, thinks of nothing further but flight. It must then be no other than the priest returned to the quest of his idol.

Wilson threw his weight against the door, but this was no garden gate to give before such blows. At the end of a half dozen attempts, he paused, bruised and dizzy. It seemed impossible to force the bolt. Yet

no sooner had he reached this conclusion than the necessity became compelling; the bolt *must* be forced. At such moments one's emotions are so intensified that, if there be any hidden passion, it is instantly brought to light. With the impelling need of reaching the girl's side — a frantic need out of proportion to any normal relationship between them — Wilson realized partly the instinct which had governed him from the moment he had first caught sight of her features in the rain. If at this stage it could not properly be called love, it was at least an obsessing passion with all love's attributes. As he paused there in blinding fury at being baffled by this senseless wooden door, he saw her as he had seen the faces between the stars, looking down at him tenderly and trustingly. A lump rose to his throat and his heart grew big within him. There was nothing now — no motive, no ambition, no influence — which could ever control him until after this new great need was satisfied. All this came over him in a flash — he saw as one sees an entire landscape by a single stroke of lightning. Then he faced the door once again.

The simple accident of the muzzle of his revolver striking against the door knob furnished Wilson the inspiration for his next attack. He examined the cylinder and found that four cartridges remained. These were all. Each one of them was precious and would be doubly so once he was beyond this barrier. He thrust the muzzle of the revolver into the lock and fired. The bullet ripped and tore and splintered.

Again he placed his shoulder to the door and pushed. It gave a trifle, but still held. He must sacrifice another cartridge. He shot again and this time, as he threw his body full against the bolt, it gave. He fell in atop the débris, but instantly sprang to his feet and stumbled along the hall to the stairway. He mounted this three steps at a time. At the door to the study he was again checked — there was no light within and no voice to greet him. He called her name; the ensuing silence was ghastly in its suggestiveness. He started through the door, but a slight rustling or creak caused him to dart back, and a knife in the hand of some unknown assailant missed him by a margin so slight that his sleeve was ripped from elbow to wrist.

With cocked revolver Wilson waited for the rush which he expected to follow immediately. Save that the curtains before him swayed slightly, there was nothing to show that he was not the only human being in the house. Sorez might still be within unconscious, but what of the girl? He called her name. There was no reply. He dashed through the curtains — for the sixteenth of a second felt the sting of a heavy blow on his scalp, and then fell forward, the world swirling into a black pit at his feet.

When Wilson came to himself he realized that he was in some sort of vehicle. The morning light had come at last — a cold, luminous gray wash scarcely yet of sufficient intensity to do more than outline the world. He attempted to rise, but fell

back weakly. He felt his neck and the collar of the luxurious bath robe he still wore to be wet. It was a sticky sort of dampness. He moved his hand up farther and found his hair to be matted. His fingers came in contact with raw flesh, causing him to draw them back quickly. The carriage jounced over the roadbed as though the horses were moving at a gallop. For a few moments he was unable to associate himself with the past at all; it was as though he had come upon himself in this situation as upon a stranger. The driver without the closed carriage seemed bent upon some definite enough errand, turning corners, galloping up this street and across that. He tried to make the fellow hear him, but above the rattling noise this was impossible. There seemed to be nothing to do but to lie there until the end of the journey, wherever that might be.

He lay back and tried to delve into the past. The first connecting link seemed years ago, — he was running away from something, her hand within his. The girl — yes, he remembered now, but still very indistinctly. But soon with a great influx of joy he recalled that moment at the door when he had realized what she meant to him, then the blind pounding at the door, then the run upstairs and — this.

He struggled to his elbow. He must get back to her. How had he come here? Where was he being taken? He was not able to think very clearly and so found it difficult to devise any plan of action, but the

necessity drove him on as it had in the face of the locked door. He must stop the carriage and — but even as he was exerting himself in a struggle to make himself heard, the horses slowed down, turned sharply and trotted up a driveway to the entrance of a large stone building. Some sort of an attendant came out, exchanged a few words with the driver, and then, opening the door, looked in. He reached out his hand and groped for Wilson's pulse.

"Where am I?" asked Wilson.

"That 's all right, old man," replied the attendant in the paternal tone of those in lesser official positions. "Able to walk, or shall I get a stretcher?"

"Walk? Of course I can walk. What I want to know is ——"

But already the strong arms were beneath his shoulders and half lifting him from the seat.

"Slowly. Slowly now."

Wilson found himself in a corridor strong with the fumes of ether and carbolic acid.

"See here," he expostulated, "I did n't want to come here. I —— where 's the driver?"

"He went off as soon as you got out."

"But where ——"

"Come on. This is the City Hospital and you 're hurt. The quicker you get that scalp of yours sewed up the better."

For a few steps Wilson walked along submissively, his brain still confused. The thought of her came once again, and he struggled free from the detaining arm

and turned upon the attendant who was leading him to the accident room.

"I 'm going back," he declared. "This is some conspiracy against the girl. I 'll find out what it is — and I 'll ——"

"The sooner you get that scalp fixed," interrupted the attendant, "the sooner you 'll find the girl."

The details of the next hour were blurred to him. He remembered the arrival of the brisk young surgeon, remembered his irritated greeting at sight of him — "Another drunken row, I suppose" — and the sharp fight he put up against taking ether. He had but one thought in mind — he must not lose consciousness, for he must get back to the girl. So he fought until two strong men came in and sat one on his chest and one on his knees. When he came out of this he was nicely tucked in bed. They told him that probably he must stay there three or four days — there was danger of the wound growing septic.

Wilson stared at the pretty nurse a moment and then asked, "I beg your pardon — how long did you say?"

"Three days anyway, and possibly longer."

"Not over three hours longer," he replied.

She smiled, but shook her head and moved away.

It was broad daylight now. He felt of his head — it was done up in turban-like bandages. He looked around for his clothes; they were put away. The problem of getting out looked a difficult one. But he must. He tried again to think back as to what had happened to him. Who had placed him in the carriage and given

orders to the driver? Had it been done to get rid of him or out of kindness? Had it been done by the priest or by Sorez? Above all, what in the meanwhile had become of his comrade?

When the visiting surgeon came in, Wilson told him quite simply that he must leave at once.

"Better stay, boy. A day here now may save you a month."

"A day here now might spoil my life."

"A day outside might cost it."

"I 'm willing."

"Well, we can't hold you against your will. But think again; you 've received an ugly blow there and it has left you weak."

Wilson shook his head.

"I must get out of here at once, whatever the cost."

The surgeon indifferently signed the order for his release and moved on. The nurse brought his clothes. His only outside garment was the long, gold embroidered lounging robe he had thrown on while his own clothes were drying. He stared at it helplessly. Then he put in on. It did not matter — nothing mattered but getting back to her as soon as possible.

A few minutes later the citizens of Boston turned to smile at the sight of a young man with pale, drawn face hurrying through the streets wearing a white linen turban and an oriental robe. He saw nothing of them.

CHAPTER VI

Blind Man's Buff

WILSON undoubtedly would have been stopped by the police within three blocks had it not been for the seriousness of his lean face and the evident earnestness with which he was hurrying about his business. As it was, he gathered a goodly sized crowd of street gamins who hooted at his heels until he was forced to take to the side streets. Here for a few squares he was not annoyed. The thing that was most disturbing him was the realization that he knew neither the name of the street nor the number of the house into which he had so strangely come last night. He knew its general direction—it lay beyond the Public Gardens and backed upon the water front, but that was all. With only this vague description he could not ask for help without exciting all manner of suspicion. He must depend upon his instinct. The situation seemed to him like one of those grotesque predicaments of a dream. Had his brain been less intently occupied than it was with the urgency of his mission, he would have suffered acutely.

He could not have had a worse section of the city to traverse — his course led him through the business district, where he passed oddly enough as a fantastic

checked. This roused within him the sa
savage man who had grasped the joist
upon the group. He did n't do much, his
upon the ground and he raised them, thro
head quickly.

"Let me through," he said.

A few, even at that, shifted to one sid
dozen larger boys pressed in more closely
on. They had not seen in his eyes what t

"I 'm in a hurry," he said. "Let me t

Some of the crowd laughed; some je
them waited expectantly. Wilson took a
breath. His frame stiffened, and then w
he hurled himself forward. He must h
mad, for as he bored a passage through, s
right and left, he saw nothing, heard
nothing. His teeth together, his min
centered with burning intensity upon the

which he fought Indians. It would have taken a half dozen strong men to stop him, and no one ventured to do more than strike at him.

Once he was free of them, he started on, hoping to get across Park Street and into the Common. But the pack was instantly at his heels again after the manner of their kind. He glanced about him baffled, realizing that with the increasing excitement his chances of pulling clear of them lessened. He dreaded the arrival of the police — that would mean questioning, and he could give no satisfactory explanation of his condition. To tell the truth would be to incriminate himself, compromise the girl, and bring about no end of a complication. He turned sharply and made up the hill at a run. He was a grotesque enough figure with the long robe streaming at his heels, his head surmounted by the fantastic turban, and his face roughened with two days' beard, but he made something of a pathetic appeal, too. He was putting up a good fight. It took only half an eye to see that he was running on his nerve and that in his eagerness to get clear, there was nothing of cowardice. Even now there was not one of the rabble who dared come within fighting distance of him. It was the harrying they enjoyed — the sight of a man tormented. A policeman elbowed his way through the crowd and instead of clubbing back the aggressors, pushed on to the young man who was tottering near his finish.

Wilson saw him. He gave one last hurried look about on the chance of finding some loophole of escape from that which was worse than the crowd. His eyes fell

upon the face of a young man in an automobile which was moving slowly up the hill. It took the latter but a glance to see that Wilson was a gentleman hard pushed. The appeal in the eyes was enough. He ordered the machine stopped and threw open the door. As Wilson reached it, he leaned forward and grasped his shoulders, dragging him in. Then the driver threw back his lever and the machine leaped forward like an unleashed dog. The officer ordered them to stop, but they skimmed on up the hill and turning to the left found Beacon Street a straight path before them.

"Narrow squeak that time, old man," smiled the stranger. "What the devil was the trouble?"

"This, I suppose," answered Wilson, as soon as he had caught his breath, lifting a corner of the elaborate gown. "And this," touching the bandages on his head.

"But what in thunder did they chase you for?"

"I guess they thought I was crazy — or drunk."

"Well, it was n't fair sport at a hundred to one. Where shall I land you?"

Wilson pondered a second. He would only lose time if he got out and attempted again to find the house in that rig.

"If — if I could only get some clothes."

"Where 's your hotel or home? Take you anywhere you say."

"I have n't either a home or a hotel," answered Wilson, deliberately. "And these are all the clothes I have in the world."

"Is that a dream?"

"It is the truth."

"But how ——" exclaimed the other.

"I can't tell you now how it came about, but it is the truth that I am without a cent, and that this is my entire wardrobe."

"Where did you come from this morning?" asked the other, still incredulous.

"From the hospital."

Wilson hesitated just a second; he knew that in asking anything further he ran the risk of being mistaken for a charlatan, but this seemed now his only chance of getting back to her. They were speeding out through the Fenway, but the driver had now slowed down to await further orders. The man would drop him anywhere he said, but even supposing he brought him back to the vicinity of the house, he could not possibly escape observation long enough to locate that little door in the rear — the only clue he had to identification of the house. If ever a man's exterior gave promise of generous help, the features of this fellow by his side did. He was of about his own age, smooth shaven, with a frank, open face that gave him a clean and wholesome appearance. He had the lithe frame and red cheeks of an athlete in training — his eyes clear as night air, his teeth white as a hound's. But it was a trick of the eyes which decided Wilson — a bright eagerness tinged with humor and something of dreams, which suggested that he himself was alert for just such adventures as this in which Wilson found himself. He glanced up and found the other studying him curiously as though try-

"That 's all right, old man. Y
obliged to 'fess up to me."

"I wanted to tell you that much," s
"because I want to ask something of
to give me a suit of clothes and enou
me alive for a week."

Wilson saw the other's brows cont
as though in keen annoyance or disap
mediocre turn in a promising situa
quickly:

"I 'm not asking this altogether for
a girl involved — a girl in great dang
to her soon, there is still hope that I ca

The other's face brightened instantl

"What 's that you say? A girl in

"In serious danger. This ——" l
linen turban, "this ought to give you
serious; I was on my way to her when

From here Wilson knew nothing of the direction or the locality.

"My name is Danbury," his rescuer introduced himself, "and I'm glad to be of help to you. We're about the same size and I guess you can get into some of my clothes. But can't I send a wire or something to the girl that you are coming?"

Wilson shook his head. "I don't know exactly where she is myself. You see I — I found her in the dark and I lost her in the dark."

"Sort of a game of blind man's buff," broke in Danbury. "But how the devil did you get that swipe in the head?"

"I don't know any more than you where that came from."

"You look as though you ought to be tucked away in bed on account of it. You are still groggy."

Wilson tried to smile, but, truth to tell, his head was getting dizzy again and he felt almost faint.

"Lie back and take it easy until we reach the house. I'll give you a dose of brandy when we get there."

The machine slid through a stone gateway and stopped before a fine, rambling white house set in the midst of green trees and with a wide sweep of green lawn behind it. A butler hurried out and at a nod took hold of one of Wilson's arms and helped him up the steps — though it was clear the old fellow did not like the appearance of his master's guest. Of late, however, the boy had brought home several of whom he did not approve. One of them — quite the worst one to his

mind — was now waiting in the study. The butler had crossed himself after having escorted him in. If ever the devil assumed human shape, he would say that this was no other than his satanic majesty himself.

"A gentleman to see you, sir, in the study."

"The devil you say," snapped Danbury.

"I did not say it, sir."

"I wanted to take this gentleman in there. However, we will go to the den."

Danbury led the way through a series of rooms to a smaller room which opened upon the green lawn. It was furnished in mahogany with plenty of large, leather-bottomed chairs and a huge sofa. The walls were decorated with designs of yachts and pictures of dogs. This room evidently was shut off from the main study by the folding doors which were partly concealed by a large tapestry. Danbury poured out a stiff drink of brandy and insisted upon Wilson's swallowing it, which he did after considerable choking.

"Now," said Danbury, "you lie down while John is getting some clothes together, and I 'll just slip into the next room and see what my queer friend wants."

Wilson stretched himself out and gave himself up to the warm influx of life which came with the stimulation from the drink. Pound after pound seemed to be lifting from his weary legs and cloud after cloud from his dulled brain. He would soon be able to go back now. He felt a new need for the sight of her, for the touch of her warm fingers, for the smile of good fellowship from her dark eyes. In these last few hours he

felt that he had grown wonderfully in his intimacy with her and this found expression in his need of her. Lying there, he felt a craving that bit like thirst or hunger. It was something new to him thus to yearn for another. The sentiment dormant within him had always found its satisfaction in the impersonal in his vague and distant dreams. Now it was as though all those fancies of the past had suddenly been gathered together and embodied in this new-found comrade.

The voices in the next room which had been subdued now rose to a point where some phrases were audible. The younger man seemed to be getting excited, for he kept exclaiming,

"Good. That 's bully!"

Their words were lost once more, but Wilson soon heard the sentence,

"I 'm with you — with you to the end. But what are *you* going to get out of this?"

Then for the first time he heard the voice of the other. There was some quality in it that made him start. He could not analyze it, but it had a haunting note as though it went back somewhere in his own past. It made him — without any intention of overhearing the burden of the talk — sit up and listen. It was decidedly the voice of an older man — perhaps a foreigner. But if this were so, a foreigner who had lived long in this country, for the accent consisted of a scarcely perceptible blur. He spoke very slowly and with a cold deliberation that was unpleasant. It was so a judge might pronounce sentence

of death. It was unemotional and forbidding. Yet there were little catches in it that reminded Wilson of some other voice which he could not place.

"My friend," came the voice more distinctly, as though the owner had risen and now faced the closed doors between the two rooms, "my friend, the interests I serve are truly different from yours; you serve sentiment; I, justice and revenge. Yet we shall each receive our reward in the same battle." He paused a moment. Then he added,

"A bit odd, is n't it, that such interests as yours and mine should focus at a point ten thousand miles from here?"

"Odd? It 's weird! But I 'm getting used to such things. I picked up a chap this morning whose story I would n't have believed a year ago. Now I 've learned that most anything is possible — even you."

"I?"

"Yes, you and your heathen army, and your good English, and your golden idol."

"I object to your use of the word 'heathen,'" the other replied sharply.

Wilson started from his couch, now genuinely interested. But the two had apparently been moving out while this fag-end of the conversation was going on, for their voices died down until they became but a hum. He fell back again, and before he had time to ponder further Danbury hurried in with a suit of clothes over his arm.

"Here," he cried excitedly, "try on these. I must

be off again in a hurry. I did n't mean to keep you waiting so long, but we 'll make up the time in the machine."

He tossed out a soft felt hat and blue serge suit. Wilson struggled into the clothes. Save that the trousers were a bit short, the things fitted well enough. At any rate, he looked more respectable than in a lounging robe. The latter he cast aside, and as he did so something fell from it. It was a roll of parchment. Wilson had forgotten all about it, and now thrust it in an inside pocket. He would give it back to Sorez, for very possibly it was of some value. He had not thought of it since it had rolled out of the hollow image.

Danbury led the way out the door as soon as Wilson had finished dressing. The latter felt in one of the vest pockets and drew out a ten dollar bill. He stared from Danbury to the money.

"Tuck it away, man, tuck it away," said Danbury.

"I can't tell you ——"

"Don't. Don't want to hear it. By the way, you 'd better make a note of the location of this house in case you need to find me again. Three hundred and forty Bellevue, — remember it? Here, take my card and write it down."

It took them twenty minutes to reach the foot of Beacon street, and here Wilson asked him to stop.

"I 've got to begin my hunt from here. I wish I could make you understand how more than grateful I am."

"Don't waste the time. Here 's wishing you luck and let me know how you come out, will you?"

He reached forth his hand and Wilson grasped it.

"I will."

"Well, s'long, old man. Good luck again."

He spoke to the chauffeur. In less than a minute Wilson was alone again on the street where he had stood the night before.

CHAPTER VII

The Game Continues

IT was almost noon, which made it eight hours since Wilson was carried out of the house. He had had less than four hours' sleep and only the slight nourishment he had received at the hospital since he and the girl dined at midnight, yet he was now fairly strong. His head felt sore and bruised, but he was free of the blinding ache which so weakened him in the morning. An austere life together with the rugged constitution he inherited from his Puritan ancestors was now standing him in good stead. He turned into the narrow street which ran along the water front in the rear of the Beacon Street houses and began his search for the gate which had admitted him to so many unforeseen complications. The river which had raged so turbently in the dark was now as mild and blue as the sky above. A few clouds, all that were left of the threatening skies of the morning, scudded before a westerly breeze. It was a fair June day — every house flooded with sunshine until, however humble, it looked for the moment like a sultan's palace. The path before him was no longer a blind alley leading from danger into chaos.

He found that nearly a third of the houses were closed for the summer, and that of these at least one half had small doors leading into fenced courtyards in the rear. There was not a single mark by which he might identify that one which he had battered down. He had only forced the lock so that the door when held closed again would show no sign of having been touched. The priest, or whoever it was who had entered after him, must have taken the same precaution, for every gate was now fast shut. It seemed a hopeless search. Then he happened to remember that the policeman had said that there was glass atop this particular wall. He retraced his steps. The clue was a good one; he discovered with a bounding heart that one alone of all the entrances was so protected. He tried the door, and found to his further relief that it gave readily. He stepped within and closed the gate behind him. He saw then that it had been held by the same piece of joist he himself had used, but had been so hastily and lightly fixed as merely to hold the door shut. He ran across the yard and in another minute was through the window and once again in the lower hall. It was fairly light there now; he did not feel as though this was the same house. This was the third time that he had hurried along this passage on his way to unknown conditions above, and each time, though within a period of less than a full day, had marked a crisis in his life.

As he sprang up the stairs it did not occur to him that he was unarmed and yet running full ahead into what had proven a danger spot. It would have mat-

tered nothing had he realized this. He had not been long enough in such games to value precaution. To reach her side as quickly as possible was the only idea he could grasp now. At the top of the second flight he called her name. He received no reply.

He crossed the hall and pushed aside the curtains which before had concealed his unknown assailant. The blinds were still closed, so that the room was in semi-darkness. The fire had gone out. There was no sign of a human being. Wilson shouted her name once again. The silence closed in upon him oppressively. He saw the dead hearth, saw the chair in which she had curled herself up and gone to sleep, saw the rug upon which Sorez had reclined, saw the very spot where she had sat with the image in her lap, saw where she had stood as she had thrust the revolver into his hand and sent him on his ill-omened errand. But all these things only emphasized her absence. It was as though he were looking upon the scene of events of a year past. She had gone.

He hurried into the next room — the room where Sorez, fainting, had fumbled at the safe until he opened it — the room where he had first seen the image which had really been the source of all his misfortunes. The safe door was closed, but about the floor lay a number of loose papers, as though the safe had been hastily ransacked. The ebony box which had contained the idol was gone. Some of the papers were torn, which seemed to show that this had been done by the owner in preparing for hasty flight rather than

by a thief, who would merely rummage through them. Wilson picked up an envelope bearing a foreign postmark. It was addressed to Dr. Carl Sorez, and bore the number of the street where this house was located. The stamp was of the small South American Republic of Carlina and the postmark "Bogova." Wilson thrust the empty envelope in his pocket.

Coming out of here, he next began a systematic examination of every room on that floor. In the boudoir where he had found clothes for the girl, he discovered her old garments still hanging where she had placed them to dry. Her dress was spread across the back of a chair, her stockings were below them, and her tiny mud-bespattered shoes on the floor. They made him start as though he had suddenly come upon the girl herself. He crossed the room and almost timidly placed his hands upon the folds of the gown. These things were so intimate a part of her that it was almost like touching her hand. It brought up to him very vividly the picture of her as she stood shivering with the cold, all dripping wet before the flames. His throat ached at the recollection. It had never occurred to him that she might vanish like this unless, as he had half feared, he might return to find Sorez dead. This new turn left him more bewildered than ever. He went into every room of the house from attic to cellar and returned again to the study with only this fact of her disappearance to reward him for his efforts of the last three hours.

Had this early morning intruder abducted them

both, or had they successfully hidden themselves until after he left and then, in a panic, fled? Had the priest, fearing for Wilson's life, thrown him into the carriage rather than have on his hands a possible murder? Or after the priest had gone did Sorez find him and take this way to rid himself of an influence that might destroy his power over the girl? This last would have been impossible of accomplishment if the girl herself knew of it. The other theories seemed improbable. At any rate, there was little use in sitting here speculating, when the problem still remained of how to locate the girl.

He made his way back to the safe and examined some of the torn letters; they were all in Spanish. A large part of them bore the same postmark, " Bogova, Republic of Carlina." The sight of the safe again recalled to him the fact that he still had in his possession the parchment which had dropped from the interior of the idol. It was possible that this might contain some information which would at any rate explain the value which these two men evidently placed upon it. He took it out of his pocket and looked at it with some curiosity. It was very tightly rolled in a covering of what appeared to be oilskin. He cut the threads which held it together and found a second covering sewed with sinew of some sort. This smelled musty. Cutting this, he found still a third covering of a finely pounded metal looking like gold-foil. This removed revealed a roll of parchment some four inches long and of about an inch in thickness. When un-

rolled Wilson saw that there were two parchments; one a roughly drawn map, and the other a document covered with an exceedingly fine script which he could not in this light make out at all. Without a strong magnifying glass, not a word was decipherable. He thrust it back in his pocket with a sense of disappointment, when he recalled that he could take it to the Public Library which was not far from there and secure a reading glass which would make it all clear. He would complete his investigation in the house and then go to the reading room where he had spent so much of his time during the first week he was in Boston.

He picked up several fragments of the letters scattered about, in the hope of obtaining at least some knowledge of Sorez. The fact that the man had stopped to tear them up seemed to prove that he had made plans to depart for good, sweeping everything from the safe and hastily destroying what was not valuable. Wilson knew a little Spanish and saw that most of the letters were of recent date and related to the death of a niece. Others mentioned the unsettled condition of government affairs in Carlina. At one time Sorez must have been very close to the ruling party, for several of the letters were from a man who evidently stood high in the ministry, judged by the intimacy which he displayed with affairs of state. He spoke several times of the Expedition of the Hills, in which Sorez had apparently played a part. But the most significant clause

which Wilson found in his hasty examination of the remnants was this reference:

"There is still, I hear, a great bitterness felt among the Mountain tribes over the disappearance of the idol of their Sun God. They blame this on the government and more than half suspect that you were an important factor in its vanishing. Have a care and keep a sharp lookout. You know their priest is no ordinary man. They have implicit faith that he will charm it back to them."

This was dated three months before. Wilson put the few remaining bits of this letter in his pocket. Was it possible that this grinning idol which already had played so important a part in his own life was the one mentioned here? And the priest of whom Sorez spoke — could it be he who ruled these tribes in the Andes? It was possible — Lord, yes, *anything* was possible. But none of these things hinted as to where the girl now was.

He came back into the study and took a look into the small room to the left. He saw his own clothes there. He had forgotten all about them. They were wrinkled and scarcely fit to wear — all but his old slouch hat. He smiled as he recalled that at school it was thought he showed undue levity for a theological student in wearing so weather-beaten and rakish a hat. He was glad of the opportunity to exchange for it the one he now wore. He picked it up from the chair where it lay. Beneath the rim, but protruding so as to be easily seen, was a note. He snatched it out, knowing it was from her as truly as though he had heard her voice. It read:

"DEAR COMRADE:

I don't know what has become of you, but I know that if you're alive you'll come back for me. We are leaving here now. I have n't time to tell you more. Go to the telephone and ring up Belmont 2748.

Hastily, your comrade,

JO MANNING."

Wilson caught his breath. With the quick relief he felt almost light-headed. She was alive — she had thought of him — she had trusted him! It deepened the mystery of how he had come to be carried from the house — of where they succeeded in hiding themselves — but, Lord, he was thankful for it all now. He would have undergone double what he had been through for the reward of this note — for this assurance of her faith in him. It cemented their friendship as nothing else could. For him it went deeper. The words, "You 'll come back here for me," tingled through his brain like some sweet song. She was alive — alive and waiting for him to come back. There is nothing finer to a man than this knowledge, that some one is waiting his return. It was an emotion that Wilson in his somewhat lonely life had never experienced save in so attenuated a form as not to be noticeable. He lingered a moment over the thought, and then, crushing the old hat — now doubly dear — over his bandaged head, hurried out of this house in which he had run almost the gamut of human emotions. He went out by the laundry window, closing it behind him, across the courtyard, and made the street without being seen. That was the last time, he thought, that he would

ever set foot within that building. He did n't find a public telephone until he reached Tremont Street. He entered the booth with his heart beating up in his throat. It did n't seem possible that when a few minutes ago he did n't know whether she was dead or alive, that he could now seat himself here and hope to hear her voice. His hand trembled as he took down the receiver. It seemed an eternity before he got central; another before she connected him with Belmont. He grew irritable with impatience over the length of time that elapsed before he heard,

"A dime, please."

He was forced to drop the receiver and go out for change. Every clerk was busy, but he interrupted one of them with a peremptory demand for change. The clerk, taken by surprise, actually obeyed the command without a word. When Wilson finally succeeded in getting the number, he heard a man's voice, evidently a servant. The latter did not know of a Miss Manning. Who did live there? The servant, grown suspicious and bold, replied,

"Never mind now, but if ye wishes to talk with any Miss Manning ye can try somewheres else. Good-bye."

"See here — wait a minute. I tell you the girl is there, and I must talk to her."

"An' I 'm telling ye she is n't."

"Is there a Mr. Sorez there ——"

"Oh, the man who is just after comin'? Wait a minute now," he put in more civilly, "an' I 'll see, sor."

Wilson breathed once more. He started at every fairy clicking and jingle which came over the waiting line.

"Waiting?"

He almost shouted his reply in fear lest he be cut off.

"Yes! Yes! waiting. Don't cut me off. Don't ——"

"Is this you?"

The voice came timidly, doubtingly — with a little tremor in it, but it was her voice.

He had not known it long, and yet it was as though he had always known it.

"Jo — comrade — are you safe?"

"Yes, and you? Oh, David!" she spoke his name hesitatingly, "David, where did you go?"

"I was hurt a little. I lost consciousness."

"Hurt, David?"

"Not seriously, but that is why I could n't come back. I was carried to a hospital."

"David!"

Her voice was tender with sympathy.

"And you — I came back to the study for you. You were gone."

"We were hidden. There is a secret room where we stayed until daylight."

"Then it was ——"

"The priest. Sorez was so weak and frightened."

"He came for the image?"

"Yes, but he did not get it. Was it he who — who hurt you, David?"

"It must have been. It was just as I came into the study."

"And he carried you out?"

"Because he thought the house empty, I guess, and feared I was hurt worse than I was."

"And you really are not badly hurt?"

"Not badly."

"But how much — in what way?"

"Just a blow on the head. Please not to think about it."

"I have thought so many horrible things."

"Where are you now?"

"Mr. Sorez did not dare to stay there. He really is much stronger, and so he came here to a friend's. I did not dare to let him come alone."

"But you are n't going to stay there. What are you going to do now?"

He thought she hesitated for a moment.

"I can't tell, David. My head is in such a whirl."

"You ought to go back home," he suggested.

"Home? My home is with my father, and nowhere else."

"I want to see you."

"And I want to see you, David, but ——"

"I 'm coming out there now."

"No! NO! not yet, David."

"Why not?"

"Because ——"

"Why not? I must see you."

"Because," she said, as though with sudden deter-

mination, "because first I wish to make up my mind to something. I must do it by myself, David."

"I'll not disturb you in that. I just wish to see you."

"But you would disturb me."

"How?"

"I can't tell you."

There was a moment's pause. Then,

"David, I may go away a long distance."

"Where?"

"I can't tell you now, but I may go at once. This — this may be the last time I can talk with you for — oh, for months."

He caught his breath.

"What do you mean by that? What has happened?"

"I have promised not to tell."

"But you must, girl. Why — you — this man Sorez has no right to exact promises from you. He ——"

"You don't understand, David. It — it has to do with my father and with — with what I saw."

"In that cursed image?"

"Yes, the image. But it is not cursed, David."

"It is — it is if it takes you away."

"You see," she trembled, "you see, I can't discuss it with you."

"But I don't see. I think you ought — you must ——"

"Must, David?"

"No — not that. I suppose I have n't the right,

only — well, it sort of takes my breath away, you see, to think of your going off — out of my life again."

"It 's odd that you should mind — I 've been in it so short a time."

"You 've been in it for years," he ran on impulsively. "You 've been in it ever since I learned to look between the stars and found you there."

There was silence for a moment, and then he heard her voice,

"David."

"Yes."

"I have a feeling that I may come back into it again."

"You 'll never go out of it. I 'll not let you. I 'll ——"

"Don't be foolish, David. And now I must go. But, David — are you listening, David?"

"Yes."

"Don't try to find me. Don't try to see me. I 'm safe, but if I should need you, I 'll send for you. Will you come?"

"To the ends of the earth."

"You must not ring me up again. But before I go away, if I do go away, I 'll write to you and tell you where. I will write you in care of the General Delivery, Boston — will that reach you?"

"Yes, but ——"

"That is all, David. That *must* be all now, for I must go. Good-bye."

"Jo — comrade!"

"Good-bye."

"Just a minute, I ——"

But he heard the little click of the receiver and knew that she had gone.

CHAPTER VIII

Of Gold and Jewels Long Hidden

RELUCTANTLY Wilson placed the receiver back upon the hook. It was as though he were allowing her hand to slip out of his — as though he were closing a door upon her. The phrase, "Good-bye," still rang in his ears, but grew fainter and fainter, receding as in a dream. He stared blankly at the telephone instrument. Some one opened the door, anxious to use the booth. This roused him. He came out into the store, and the life around him brought him to himself once more. But what did this new development mean? Where was Sorez leading her, and what inducement was he offering? Her father she had said. Doubtless the man was holding out to her promises of locating him. But why? His mind reverted to the idol. It was that. He wished to use her psychic power for some purpose connected with this image. And that? He had a parchment within his pocket which might explain it all!

This furnished him an objective which for the moment gave him rest from useless speculation. But even while walking to the library he felt a new and growing passion within him: bitterness towards the man who

was responsible for taking her away from him. That Sorez' claim of being able to find the girl's father was merely to cover a selfish object was of course obvious. He was playing upon her fancy and sympathy. How the girl must love this father to be lured from home by the chance phantom in a crystal picture — to be willing to follow a stranger half around the globe, perhaps, because of his promise and a dream. Yet, it was so he knew that her nature must love — it was so he would have her love. It was this capacity for fanatical devotion which struck a responsive chord in his own heart. Her love would not allow her to have her father dead even though the report came. Her love admitted no barriers of land or sea. If so she was inspired by calm, filial love, what would she not do for love of her mate? If this mysterious stranger had but died — he clenched his teeth. That was scarcely a humane or decent thing to wish.

He found a chair in one corner of the reading room and borrowed the most powerful reading glass used in the library. It was only by showing his manuscript that he was able to secure it. Even then they looked at him a bit askance, and made him conscious once more that his head was still bandaged. He had forgotten all about this, and in another minute he had forgotten all about it once again.

One of the manuscripts which he spread out upon the desk before him contained but little writing. A crudely drawn map filled almost the entire space. A drawing in the upper left-hand corner repre-

sented a blazing sun, and in the lower left-hand corner another gave the points of the compass. This doubtless served to illustrate the contents of the other manuscript.

The parchment had been rolled so long and so tightly that it was almost impossible to straighten it out. He worked carefully for fear of cracking it. It was a matter requiring some patience, and consumed the best part of half an hour. He found that the writing had been preserved wonderfully well although, as he learned later, many of the words were so misspelled or poorly written as to be undecipherable. The writing itself was painfully minute and labored — as though each letter had been formed with the greatest effort and considerable uncertainty. It was as though the author were thoroughly conversant with Latin — for it was in that tongue — but as a spoken rather than a written language. It was such Latin as might be written by a man who knew his Vulgate and prayers by heart, but who had little other use for the language. In places, where evidently the author did not know a word, he had used a symbol as though the common medium of communication with him were some sign language.

With what sort of an instrument the writing had been done it was impossible to conceive, for it was as fine as could be accomplished with the finest steel engraving. It occurred to Wilson that possibly this had been done with a view towards making it illegible to any ordinary eyes which should chance to see it. With all these difficulties it was as much as Wilson could do to make anything at all out of the parchment. But he

found the work absorbing, and as he began to get an inkling of what he really held in his hands, lost himself altogether in his task. At the end of three hours, which had passed like so many minutes, he took a piece of paper and wrote down the result of his work, leaving dashes for words which he had been unable to make out. He had this broken message:

"I, Manco Capac, priest of the Gilded Man leave this for my brothers, fearing — from strangers with —. When I heard Quesada was near and learned that he was about to — the lake I called twenty of the faithful and with great — we — piece by piece, using — to — the gifts from the bottom. Many pieces we — but much gold, gifts of plate, and — with — jewels we reached. In all six hundred and forty-seven pieces we carried to where they now rest. I will make a chart so that it may —. But beware for — the foot stumbles — death to all — except those who —. The Gilded Man is strong and will — blood and the power of the hills. I alone know and I am about to die. The other faithful children, leaped from — and their bodies I — where they are protected by —. Never must be taken from this — for — if —. Those who — death.

The gold I — in the farther cave where —, but the jewels are — beneath and —. The place is — upon the map which I have made. This I have truly written for those who —. The hand of the Gilded Man will crush any who —."

Wilson, his blood running fast, sat back and thought. It was clear that the struggle over the image was a struggle for this treasure. Neither man knew of the existence of this map. The priest fought to preserve the idol because of its sacredness as guardian of what to him was doubtless a consecrated offering to the Sun

God; Sorez, acquiring it with the tradition that the image held the secret, thought that with the psychic gift of the girl he had solved the riddle. This much seemed a reasonable explanation. But where was this treasure, and of what did it consist? He turned to the second parchment. At the end of an hour he had before him a half page of minute directions for approaching the treasure from the starting-point of a hut in the mountains. But where *were* these mountains? He had two names which might be good clues. One was "Quesada," the old Spanish adventurer, of whom Wilson had a faint recollection. It was possible that in the history of his day some mention might be made of this expedition. The other name was "Guadiva," which appeared on the map as the name of a lake. Many of the old Spanish names still remained. A good atlas might mention it.

He investigated the latter hint first. He was rewarded at once. "Guadiva" was a small lake located in the extinct volcanic cone of Mt. Veneza, beyond the upper Cordilleras. It was remarkable chiefly for a tradition which mentions this as one of the hiding places of a supposed vast treasure thrown away by the Chibcas that it might escape the hands of Quesada.

Starting with this, Wilson began a more detailed search through the literature bearing upon these South American tribes, Spanish conquest, and English treasure hunting. He was surprised to find a great deal of information. Almost without exception, however, this particular treasure which had sent Quesada to his

grave a pauper, which had lured from quiet England Raleigh, Drake, and Leigh was thought to be a myth. The hours passed and Wilson knew nothing of their passing. It was eight o'clock before he paused once more to summarize the result of his reading. In the light of the key which lay before him, the possibilities took away his breath. His quick imagination spanned the gaps in the narrative until he had a picture before his eyes that savored of the Arabian Nights. It was a glittering quest — this which had tempted so many men, for the prize was greater than Cortez had sought among the Aztecs, or Pizarro in his bloody conquest of the Incas.

He saw many thousands of the faithful Chibcas, most powerful of all the tribes upon the Alta plain, which lies a green level between the heights of the white summits of the Andes, toiling up the barren lava sides of Mount Veneza to where, locked in its gray cone, lies the lake of Guadiva. He saw this lake smiling back at the blue sky, its waters clear as the mountain air which ripples across its surface. The lake of Guadiva! How many bronzed men had whispered this name and then dropped upon their knees in prayer. To Quesada it was just a mirror of blue with unsearchable depths, but he lived to learn how much more it meant to the lithe bronze men.

For while the great world beyond was fighting through the rumbling centuries over its Christ, its Buddha, its Mahomet, a line of other men plodded the stubborn path to this beloved spot, their shoulders bent

beneath their presents, and made their prayer and offered their gifts to the Gilded Man who lived below the waters. A tenth, more often a half, of all the richness of the plains of Alta was offered there in tribute to him who was their god. He had blessed these people generously, and mighty was their offering. Upon a single feast day, tradition had it, a hundred mules with tinkling silver bells followed the high priest, in scarlet robes, to the tiny cone, their sharp feet clawing the lava road, their strong backs aching beneath the precious burden. This was then transferred to rafts and gay barges by men blindfolded by the priests and taken to the secret spot which lay above the sunken shrine. The worshipers knelt in prayer beneath the uplifted arms of their pious leaders, then raised high their golden bowls. For a moment they glinted in the sun, then flashed a mellow path beneath the waves which leaped to meet them. Jewels, rarer than any Roman conquerors found, here kissed the sun as they were tossed high, then mingled with the crystal lake like falling stars.

Here it was that Quesada, the adventurous Spaniard, had sought this treasure. He organized a horde of gold-lustful minions and descended upon the Chibcas. The latter were not by nature fighters, but they stood their ground for their god, and fought like demons. Quesada forcing his way over their bleeding bodies, killing even the women who had armed themselves with knives, pressed up the rocky trail to where the tiny lake lay as peaceful as a sleeping child. With hands

the lake sunk foot by foot while the trustir
made their prayers and waited. The a
One day when Quesada saw the treasure a
his grasp, there was a mighty rumbling
falling stone, and behold! an avalanch
raged down, killing many of the soldiers
rest, and filled in the man-made channe
ordered with fierce oath, but not a man
to the work. He was forced to retreat,
poverty and shame.

The years rolled on and still the tribu
neath the waves. Now and then some ha
returned with a tale of the unlimited wea
going to waste. One such, driven over th
to Raleigh and reported that he had seen
procession forming to climb the hill, trea
upon mules to the value of one hundr
English pounds.

Leigh sought three years and came back empty handed, but more convinced than ever that the treasure existed. Many of the Spaniards who swooped down upon the Chibcas did not return empty handed, although they failed to find the source of the El Dorado. They saw many strange customs which proved that gold in abundance was located somewhere within this small area. They saw the chiefs of the tribes cover themselves each morning with resin and then sprinkle powdered gold over their bodies until they looked as though in golden armor. This was washed off at sunset, after the evening prayer to the burning planet which they believed to be the source of all their wealth. At their death their graves were lined with jewels. The Spanish governors who later looted these tombs recovered enormous amounts; one grave yielding $18,000, another $20,000 in gold strips, and still another $65,000 in emeralds, gold chains, arrows, and other implements of beaten gold.

But the greatest incentive to the search had always been the detailed account left by Fray Pedro Simon, who for twenty years lived among these tribes as missionary, preceding Valverde, known as the Priest of the Hills.

"But the great treasure was in the lake," he wrote in his letters.

"There was no stint of gold, jewelry, emeralds, food, and other things sacrificed here when a native was in trouble. With prescribed ceremonies, two ropes were taken and attached to the rafts which were drawn

to that portion of the lake where the altar was supposed to be, below the surface. Two zipas, or priests, would accompany the person wishing to make the sacrifice on rafts which were composed of bundles of dried sticks or flotsam, tied one to another, or made from planks in the form of a punt holding three or more persons. By this means they would reach the altar and, using certain words and ceremonies, throw in their offerings, small or large, according to their means. In further reference to this lake, it was the principal and general place of worship for all this part of the country, and there are those still alive who state that they witnessed the burial of many caciques who left orders that their bodies and all their wealth be thrown in the waters. When it was rumored that the bearded men (the Spaniards) had entered the country in search of gold, many of the Indians brought their hoarded treasures and offered them as sacrifices in the lake, so that they should not fall into the hands of the Spaniards. The present cacique of the village of Simijaca alone threw into the lake forty loads of gold of one quintal each, carried by forty Indians from the village, as is proven by their own statements and those of the nephew of the cacique sent to escort the Indians."

Forty quintals, Wilson computed, is £8820, which would make this single offering worth to-day $26,460,000!

He looked up from the dry, crisp documents in front of him and glanced about the room. The tables were lined with readers; a schoolgirl scowling over her

notes, pencil to her pouting lips, an old man trying to keep his eyes open over his magazine, a young student from Technology, and a possible art student. Beyond these, there were workingmen and clerks and middle-aged bachelors. Truly they were an ordinary looking lot — prosaic enough, even mediocre, some of them. This was the twentieth century, and they sat here in this modern library reading, perhaps, tales of adventure and hidden treasure. Outside, the trolley cars clanged past. The young man attendant glanced up from his catalogue, yawned, studied the clock, and yawned again.

Wilson looked at them all; then back at his parchment.

Yes, it was still there before his eyes, and represented a treasure of probably half a billion dollars in gold and precious stones!

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CHAPTER IX

A Stern Chase

WILSON came out into the night with a sense of the world having suddenly grown larger. He stood on the broad stone steps of the library, breathing deep of the June air, and tried to get some sort of a sane perspective. Below him lay Copley Square; opposite him the spires of Trinity Church stood against the purple of the sky like lances; to the right the top of Westminster was gay with its roof garden, while straight ahead Boylston street stretched a brilliant avenue to the Common. Wilson liked the world at night; he liked the rich shadows and the splendor of the golden lights, and overhead the glittering stars with the majestic calm between them. He liked the night sounds, the clear notes of trolley bell and clattering hoofs unblurred by the undertone of shuffling feet. Now he seemed to have risen to a higher level where he saw and heard it all much more distinctly. The power and, with the power, the freedom which he felt with this tremendous secret in his possession filled him with new life. He lost the sense of being limited, of being confined. A minute ago this city, at least, had imprisoned him; now his thoughts flew unrestrained

around half the globe. But more than anything else it made him stand better in his own eyes before the girl. He need no longer await the whims of chance to bring her to him; he could go in search of her. Somehow he had never thought of her as a girl to be won by the process of slow toil — by industry; she must be seized and carried away at a single coup. The parchment which rustled crisply in his pocket whispered how.

The chief immediate value of the secret lay to him in the power it gave him to check Sorez in whatever influence he might have gained over the girl. As soon as he could convince Sorez that the girl's psychic powers were of no use to him in locating the treasure, he would undoubtedly lose interest in her. Strangely enough, Wilson felt no moral scruples in retaining the map which he had found so accidentally; to him it was like treasure-trove. If it rightly belonged to anyone, it belonged to this fanatical priest and his people.

In some way, then, he must communicate with Jo before it was too late. He knew that it was impossible to locate her through the telephone; the numbers were not all recorded in the book, and Central was not allowed to divulge the location of any of them. However, he would try to reach her again over the wire in the morning. If unsuccessful at this, he must wait for her letter. In the meanwhile he would have plenty to do in pursuing further investigation into the history and topography of the country covered by his map. Of course, a great difficulty ahead of him was

lack of funds. But, if worse came to worse, he thought it might be possible to interest someone in the project. There were always men readier to finance a venture of this sort than a surer and less romantic undertaking. He would feel better, however, to investigate it alone if possible, even if it cost him a great deal of time and labor. All those problems, however, were for the future — its present worth lay in the influence it gave him with Sorez.

He came down the library steps and started to cross the square with a view to walking, but he found his legs weak beneath him. The best thing he could do now, he thought, was to devote some attention to the recovery of his strength. He still had the change from his ten dollars, and with this recollection he felt a fresh wave of gratitude for the man who had helped him so opportunely. He must look him up later on. He boarded a car and, going down town, entered a restaurant on Newspaper Row. Here he ordered beefsteak, potatoes, and a cup of coffee. He enjoyed every mouthful of it and came out refreshed but sleepy. He went up town to one of the smaller hotels and secured a room with a bath. After a warm tub, he turned in and slept without moving until he awoke with the sun streaming into the room. He felt the old springiness in his body as he leaped out of bed, and a courage and joy beyond any he had ever known at thought of Jo and the treasure. These two new elements in his life came to him in the morning with all the freshness and vividness of their original discovery. In the full glare

of the morning sun they seemed even more real than the night before. He drew the parchment from beneath his pillow, where he had hidden it, and looked it over once more before dressing. No, it was not a dream; it was as real a thing as the commonplace furnishings of the room.

He took a plunge in cold water and hurried through his dressing in order to reach the post-office as soon as possible. He could not believe his eyes when he came downstairs and saw the clock hands pointing at twelve. He had slept over fourteen hours. Without waiting for breakfast, he hurried up town and inquired for his mail. There was nothing. He was bitterly disappointed for he had felt sure that she would write him. It did not seem possible that he could go on waiting patiently without at least one more talk with her. Though he knew it was against her wish, he made up his mind to call her up once more. He went to the nearest telephone and, asking for the number, received at the end of five minutes the reply:

"That number does n't answer, sir."

"There must be some mistake. I used it yesterday."

"I 'll try again."

He waited several minutes. The droning voice came once more.

"I get no answer, sir."

"Ring 'em hard. I know there is someone there."

But nothing Central could do roused any reply. Either the line was out of order or the occupants of the house refused to answer the call. He left the booth

with an uneasy feeling that something was wrong with the girl. He should not have allowed her to leave the telephone without telling him her address. It was possible she was held a prisoner — possible that Sorez, failing to persuade her to go with him in any other way, might attempt to abduct her. Doubtless she had told him her story, and he knew that with only an indifferent housekeeper to look after the girl no great stir would be made over her disappearance. Like dozens of others, she would be accounted for as having gone to the city to work. The more he thought of it, the more troubled he became. One thing was certain; under these circumstances he could no longer remain passive and wait for her letter. The chances were that she would not be allowed to write.

He had intended to go out and see Danbury that afternoon, but he made up his mind to take a car and go to Belmont on the chance of securing, through the local office, some information which would enable him to trace the house. If worse came to worse, he might appeal to the local police for aid.

Before starting, he returned to the hospital and had his wound examined. It was in good condition and the surgeon was able this time to use a very much smaller dressing.

"Will it need any further treatment?" Wilson inquired.

"You ought to have the dressing changed once more, but on a pinch even that will not be necessary so long as the cut keeps clean. If, however, it begins to

pain you, that means trouble. Don't neglect it a day if that happens. But I don't anticipate anything of the sort. Probably you can have the stitches out in a week."

It was a relief to be able to go out upon the street again without attracting attention. The snapshot judgment upon every man with a bandaged head is that he has been in a street fight — probably while intoxicated. He bought a clean collar and a tie and indulged in the luxury of a shoe polish and a shave. When he stepped out upon the street after this he looked more like himself than he had for six months. Had it not been for his anxiety over the girl, he would have felt exultant, buoyant.

The Belmont car took him through green fields and strips of woods rich leaved and big with sap. The sun flecked them with gold and a cooling breeze rustled them musically. After the rain of the night before the world looked as fresh as though new made. He was keenly sensitive to it all and yet it mingled strangely with the haunting foreign landscape of his imagination — a landscape with a background of the snow-tipped summits of the Andes, a landscape with larger, cruder elements. He felt as though he stood poised between two civilizations. His eyes met the conventional details of surroundings among which he had been born and brought up; he was riding on an open trolley car, surrounded by humdrum fellow-passengers who pursued the sober routine of their lives as he had expected, until within a day, to do, passing through

a country where conditions were settled — graded, as it were, so that each might lay his track and move smoothly upon it; and yet his thoughts moved among towering mountains untouched by law, among people who knew not the meaning of a straight path, among heathen gods and secret paths to hidden gold. Yes, sitting here staring at the stereotyped inscription upon the wooden seat-back before him, "Smoking on the three rear seats only" — sitting here in the midst of advertisements for breakfast foods, canned goods, and teas, — sitting here with the rounded back of the motorman and the ever moving brass brake before his eyes, he still felt in his pocket the dry parchment which had lain perhaps for centuries in the heart of a squat idol. While riding through the pretty toy suburbs in the comfort of an open car, he was still one with Raleigh and his adventurous crew sailing the open seas; while still a fellow with these settled citizens of a well-ordered Commonwealth, he was, too, comrade to the reckless Quesada — lured by the same quest. And this was not a dream — it was not a story — it was dead, sober reality. The world about him now was no vision; he saw, felt, and smelled it; the other was equally real, he had shared in a struggle to possess it, he had the testimony of his eyes to substantiate it, and the logic of his brain to prove it. If the wound upon his head was real, if this girl in search of whom he was now bent was real, if that within his pocket was real — if, in brief, he were not a lunatic in complete subjection to a delusion

— then, however extravagant it might appear, all was real.

The fact which made it substantial, as nothing else did, was the girl — the girl and all she meant to him. It must be a very genuine emotion to turn the world topsy-turvy for him as it had. This afternoon for instance, it was she who filled the sunbeams with golden light, who warmed the blue sky until it seemed of hazy fairy stuff, who sang among the leaves, who urged him on with a power that placed no limit on distance or time. Within less than a day she had so obsessed him as to cause him to focus upon the passion the entire strength of his being. The fortune of gold and jewels before him was great, but if necessary he could sacrifice it without hesitancy to bring her nearer to him. That was secondary and so was everything which lay between him and that one great need.

He sought out the telephone exchange at Belmont at once and was referred to the superintendent. He found the latter a brisk, unimaginative [redacted] — a creature of rules and regulations.

"Can't do it," he said gruffly.

Wilson went a little further into details. The girl was very possibly a prisoner — very possibly in danger.

"Go to the police with your story."

"That means the newspapers," answered Wilson. "I don't wish the affair made public. I may be altogether wrong in my suspicions, but they are of such a nature that they ought to be investigated."

"Sorry, but the rule cannot be broken."

Wilson spent fifteen minutes longer with him, but the man impatiently rose.

"That number is not listed," he said finally, "and under no circumstances are we allowed to divulge it. You will have to go to the police if you want help."

But Wilson had no idea of doing that. He still had one chance left — a ruse which had occurred to him as he left the office. He went down stairs and to the nearest telephone, where he rang up Information.

"Central?"

"Yes, sir."

"My line — Belmont 2748 — is out of order. Can you send an inspector up at once?"

"I'll see, sir."

In a minute the reply came.

"Yes, we can send a man right up."

"One thing more — from where does the inspector start? The house is closed, but I'll send my man along to go up with him."

There was a wait of a few minutes. Wilson almost held his breath. Then came the answer:

"The inspector leaves from the central office. Have your man ask for Mr. Riley."

"In twenty minutes?"

"Yes, sir."

Wilson went out and walked around the block. He had told a deliberate lie and was perpetrating a downright fraud, but he felt no conscientious scruples over it. It was only after he had exhausted every legitimate method that he had resorted to this. When he

came around to the entrance door again he found a young man standing there with a tool bag in his hand. He stepped up to him.

"This Mr. Riley?"

"Yes, sir."

"I was to tell you to go on right out to the house. The man is there."

"All right, sir."

Wilson started on, but stopped to look into the drug-store window. The man went down the street to the car corner. Wilson again circled the block and waited until he saw Riley board the car on the front platform. He kept out of sight until the car had almost passed him and then swung on to the rear. The stratagem was simplicity itself.

At the end of a ten-minute ride the inspector swung off and at the next corner Wilson followed. It was easy enough to keep the man in sight, and apparently he himself had escaped detection. The inspector approached a modest looking house setting a bit back from the road and, going to the front door, rang the bell. At the end of perhaps three minutes he rang again. At the end of another five he rang a third time. The curtains were down in the front windows, but that was not uncommon in hot June days. The inspector went to the rear. In a few minutes he came back. He tried the door once more and then, apparently bewildered, came out. He hung around for some ten minutes more, and then, returning to the corner, took the first car back.

It seemed clear enough that the occupants of the house were gone, but Wilson waited a few minutes longer, unwilling to accept the possibilities this suggested. He even went up and tried the bell himself. A servant from the neighboring house called across to him:

"They all drove off in a carriage an hour ago, sir," she said.

"How many of them?" he asked.

"Mr. Davis and his aunt and his friend, the old man, and the young girl — all of them."

"But the servants ——"

"Ain't but one — old man Sullivan," she answered with some scorn.

"And they went where?"

"Lord, now how d' ye suppose I know that?"

For a second Wilson looked so disconsolate that she offered her last bit of information.

"They took their trunks with 'em."

"Thanks," he replied as he turned on his heels and ran for the approaching car.

He made it. During the ride in town his mind was busy with a dozen different conjectures, each wilder than the preceding one. He was hoping against hope that she had written him and that her letter now awaited him in the post-office.

Reaching the Federal Building, he waited breathlessly at the tiny window while the indifferent clerk ran over the general mail. With a large bundle of letters in his hand he skimmed them over and finally

paused, started on, returned, and tossed out a letter. Wilson tore it open. It was from Jo. It read:

"DEAR COMRADE:

I have made my decision — I am going with Dr. Sorez to Bogova, South America. I have just written them at home and now I am writing you as I promised. I'm afraid you will think, like the others, that I am off on a senseless quest; but perhaps you won't. If only you knew how much my father is to me! Dr. Sorez is sure he is still living. I know he used to go to Carlina, of which Bogova is the capitol. Why he should let us believe him dead is, of course, something for me to learn. At any rate, I am off, and off — to-day. The priest makes it unsafe for Dr. Sorez to remain here any longer. You see, I have a long journey before me. But I love it. I'm half a sailor, you know.

I am writing this in the hope that you will receive it in time to meet me at the steamer — the Columba, a merchantman. It sails at four from Pier 7, East Boston. If not, let me tell you again how much I thank you for what you have done — and would do. From time to time I shall write to you, if you wish, and you can write to me in care of Dr. Carl Sorez, the Metropole, Bogova, Carlina. When I come back we must meet again. Good luck to you, comrade.

Sincerely yours,
JO MANNING."

Meet her at the steamer! The boat sailed at four. It was now quarter of. He ran from the building to Washington street. Here he found a cab.

"Five dollars," he panted, "if you get me to Pier 7, East Boston, at four o'clock."

He jumped in and had hardly closed the door before

the cabby had brought his whip across the flanks of the dozing horse. The animal came to life and tore down Washington Street at a pace that threatened to wreck the vehicle. The wheels skimmed sides of electric cars and brushed the noses of passing teams. A policeman shouted, but the cabby took a chance and kept on. Down Atlantic Avenue the light cab swayed from side to side, swerving to within a hair's distance of the elevated structure. They wasted five precious minutes at the Ferry. From here the distance was short. At one end of the wharf Wilson sprang through the small group of stevedores who, their work done, were watching the receding steamer. He was too late by five minutes. But he pushed on to the very tip of the wharf in his endeavor to get as near as possible to the boat. The deck looked deserted save for the bustling sailors. Then Fate favored him with one glance of her. She had come up from below, evidently for a last look at the wharf. He saw her — saw her start— saw her hesitate, and then saw her impulsively throw out her arms to him. He felt a lump in his throat as, with his whole heart in the action, he in his turn reached towards her.

CHAPTER X

Strange Fishing

YES, her arms were extended towards him. The fact made the world swim before his eyes. Then he thought of Sorez and — it was well Sorez was not within reach of him. Slowly the barrier widened between Wilson and his Comrade — slowly she faded from sight, even while his eyes strained to hold the last glimpse of her. It seemed as though the big ship were dragging the heart out of him. On it went, slowly, majestically, inevitably, tugging, straining until it was difficult for him to catch his breath. She was taking away not only her own sweet self, but the joy and life from everything about him; the color from the sky, the gold from the sunbeams, the savor from the breezes. To others the sky was blue, the sun warm, and the salt-laden winds came in from over the sea with pungent keenness. To others the waters were sprinkled with joyous colors — the white sails of yachts, the weather-beaten sails of the fishermen, and the gaudy funnels of the liners. But to him it was all gray, gray — a dull, sodden gray.

He felt a tug at his sleeve and heard the gruff voice of the cabby.

"What about my fare?"

"Your fare?"

He had forgotten. He reached in his pocket and drew out a roll of bills, thrusting them into the grimy hands of the man without looking at them.

"Now get out," he ordered.

Wilson watched the fading hulk until it was lost in the tangle of other shipping. Then he tried to hold the line of black smoke which it left in its wake. When that finally blended with the smoke from other funnels which misted into the under surface of the blue sky, he turned about and stared wearily at the jumble of buildings which marked the city that was left. The few who had come on a like mission dispersed, — sucked into the city channels to their destinations as nickel cash boxes in a department store are flashed to their goals. Wilson found himself almost alone on the pier. There was but one other who, like himself, seemed to find no interest left behind by the steamer. Wilson merely glanced at him, but soon looked back, his interest excited by something or other in the man's appearance. He was no ordinary looking man — a certain heavy, brooding air relieved of moroseness by twinkling black eyes marked him as a man with a personality. He was short and thick set, with shaggy, iron-gray eyebrows, a smooth-shaven face speckled on one side as by a powder scar. Beneath a thin-lipped mouth a stubborn chin protruded. He was dressed in a flannel shirt and corduroy trousers, fastened by a black belt. He had

the self-sufficient air of the sailor or miner, which is developed by living a great deal apart from other men. It seemed to Wilson that the man was watching him, too, with considerable interest. Every now and then he removed the short clay pipe which he was smoking and covered a half circle with his eyes which invariably included Wilson. Finally he lounged nearer and a few minutes later asked for a match.

Wilson, who was not much given to forming chance acquaintanceships, was at first inclined to be suspicious, and yet it was he who made the next advance, prompted, however, by his eagerness for information.

"Do you know anything about sailing lines to South America?" he asked.

The older man removed his pipe. Wilson thought he looked a bit startled — a bit suspicious at the question.

"What port?" he asked.

It occurred to Wilson that it might be just as well not to divulge his real destination. The only other South American port he could think of was Rio Janeiro, on the east coast.

"How about to Rio?"

"Hell of a hole — Rio," observed the stranger, with a sad shake of his head. "But fer that matter so 's everywhere. Never found a place what was n't. This is," he affirmed, sweeping his pipe in a semicircle.

"You 're right there," agreed Wilson, the blue sky above clouding before his eyes.

"I 've heern there 's goneter be an earthquake here

some day. Swaller up the whole darned place. Guess it 's so."

Wilson studied the man once more; he began to think the fellow was a trifle light-headed. But he decided not; he was probably only one of those with so strong an individuality as to be thought queer. The stranger was staring out to sea again as though, in the trend of fresh speculations, he had lost all interest in the conversation. However, in a minute he withdrew his pipe from his mouth, and, without turning his head, asked,

"Was you reckoning as a passenger or was yer lookin' for a chance to ship?"

That was a proposition Wilson had not considered. It had no more occurred to him that a man untrained could secure work on a ship than on a railroad.

"Think it is possible for me to get a job?" he asked. "I 've not had any experience."

"There 's some things yer don't need experience fer."

"I 'm willing to do anything — from peeling potatoes to scrubbing decks."

"There 's better nor that fer a man."

"I 'd like to find it."

The stranger studied the younger man from the corner of his eyes, pressing down the live coals in his pipe with a calloused forefinger.

"If you was only goin' to the West Coast, now."

"What? Where?"

"Say pretty far up — Say to Carlina?"

Wilson could scarcely believe his ears. He steadied himself. This must be more than mere coincidence, he thought. For all he knew, this man might be some agent of the priest. Perhaps the latter had some inkling of what had been found. But if that were so, there was little doubt but what the priest would have taken up the search for it himself. At any rate, Wilson felt well able to care for himself. The parchment was safe in an inside pocket which he had fastened at the top with safety pins. The advantage in having it there was that he could feel it with a slight pressure of his arm. If an opportunity offered to get to Carlina, he would accept it at whatever risk. Wilson answered slowly after the manner of one willing to consider an offer but eager to make a good bargain.

"I don't know but what Carlina would suit me as well as Rio. It 's more to get away from here than anything."

"You has the right spirit, m' boy."

He paused, then added indifferently,

"Dunno but what I can find a berth fer you. Come if ye wanter, an' we 'll talk it over."

Wilson followed. This at least offered possibilities. The stranger lolled the length of the dock shed and out into the street as unconcernedly as though only upon a stroll. They turned into the main thoroughfare among the drays and ship-chandlers' shops, out into the busy, unconcerned life of the city. The stranger was as unconscious of the confusion about him as though he were the only occupant of the street,

crossing in front of the heavy teams with a nonchalance that forced frantic drivers to draw their horses to their haunches, and motormen to bend double over their brakes. Oaths and warnings apparently never reached him. Once Wilson clutched at his broad shoulders to save him from a motor car. He merely spat at the rear wheels.

"Could n't git killed if I wanted to," he grumbled.

They brought up finally before a barroom and entered, passing through to the small iron tables in the rear. The dim gas revealed smudged walls ornamented with dusty English sporting prints — a cock fight, a fist fight, and a coach and four done in colors. A dwarf of a waiter swabbed off the wet disks made by beer glasses.

"Two half and halfs," ordered the stranger.

When they were brought, he shoved one towards Wilson.

"Drink," he said. "Might 's well.

Wilson gulped down the bitter beer. It cleared his head and gave him new life. The stranger ordered another.

"Can't talk to a man when he 's thirsty," he observed.

The room grew hazily warm, and Wilson felt himself glowing with new life and fresh courage.

"My name is Stubbs — Jonathan Stubbs," explained the stranger, as Wilson put down the empty mug. "Follered the sea for forty year. Rotten hard work — rotten bad grub — rotten poor pay. Same on

land as on sea, I reckon. No good anywhere. Got a friend who 's a longshoreman and says th' same 'bout his work. No good anywhere."

He paused as though waiting for the other to introduce *himself*.

"My name is Wilson, have n't done much of anything — and that 's rotten poor fun. But I want to get to South America and I 'll do anything under the sun that will pay my way there."

"Anything?"

"Yes," laughed Wilson, "anything, to heaving coal."

"'Fraid of your neck?" asked Stubbs.

"Try me."

"Gut any family?"

"No."

"Ever shipped afore?"

"No."

Stubbs settled further back in his chair and studied the ceiling.

"Wotcher want to git there for?"

"I have a friend who 's somewhere down there," he said frankly.

"Man?"

"No."

"Women," mused Stubbs, "is strange. Can't never lay your hand on a woman. Here they are an' here they ain't. I had a woman once't. Yes, I had a woman once't."

He relapsed into a long silence and Wilson studied

him with friendlier interest than before. Life was written large upon his wrinkled face, but the eyes beneath the heavy brows redeemed many of the bitter lines. It was clear that the man had lived much within himself in spite of his long rubbing against the world. He was a man, Wilson thought, who could warn men off, or welcome them in, at will.

"Maybe," he resumed, "maybe you 'll come an' maybe you won't. Come if you wanter."

"Where to?"

"To Choco Bay. Can't promise you nothin' but a berth to the port, — good pay an' a damned rough time after you get there. Maybe your throat cut in the end."

"I 'll go," said Wilson, instantly.

The gray eyes brightened.

"Now I ain't promised you nothin', have I, but to git you to the coast?"

"No."

"Hain't said nothin', have I, 'bout what may happen to you after you git there?"

"Only that I may get my throat cut."

"What 's the difference if you do? But if you wants to, I 'll gamble my chest agin a chaw that you won't. Nothin' ever comes out right."

"But I don't want to. I most particularly object to getting my throat cut."

"Then," said Stubbs, "maybe you will. Where 's your kit?"

"On my back."

"You 'll need more than that. Come on."

Stubbs led the way to a second-hand store and bought for his new-found friend a flannel shirt, trousers like his own, a pair of stout boots, and a cap.

Wilson had nothing left of his ten dollars.

"All the same," said Stubbs. "Settle when you git your pay."

He led him then to a pawn shop where he picked out a thirty-two calibre revolver and several boxes of cartridges. Also a thick-bladed claspknife.

"See here, Stubbs," objected Wilson, "I don't need those things. I 'm not going pirating, am I?"

"Maybe so. Maybe only missionaryin'. But a gun 's a useful ornyment in either case."

He drew out a heavy silver watch and with his forefinger marking off each hour, computed how much time was left to him.

"What d' ye say," he broke out, looking up at Wilson, "what d' ye say to goin' fishin', seein' as we 've gut a couple of hours on our hands?"

"Fishing?" gasped Wilson.

"Fishin'," answered the other, calmly. "I know a feller down by the wharf who 'll take us cheap. Might 's well fish as anything else. Prob'ly won't git none. Never do. I 'll jus' drop in below here and git some bait an' things."

A dozen blocks or so below, he left Wilson on the sidewalk and vanished into a store whose windows were cluttered with ship's junk. Anchor-chains, tarpaulin, marlinspikes, ropes, and odd bits of iron were

scattered in a confusion of fish nets. Stubbs emerged with a black leather bag so heavy that he was forced to ask Wilson to help him lift it to his shoulders.

"Going to fish with cast-iron worms?" asked Wilson.

"Maybe so. Maybe so."

He carried the bag lightly once it was in place and forged a path straight ahead with the same indifference to pedestrians he had shown towards teams, apparently deaf to the angry protestations of those who unwisely tried their weight against the heavy bag. Suddenly he turned to the right and clambered down a flight of stairs to a float where a man was bending over a large dory.

"Engaged for to-day?" he demanded of the young fellow who was occupied in bailing out the craft. The man glanced up at Stubbs and then turned his attention to Wilson.

"My friend," went on Stubbs, "I want to get a little fishin' 'fore dark. Will you 'commodate me?"

"Get in, then," growled the owner.

He helped Stubbs lower the bag into the stern, with the question,

"Any more to your party?"

"This is all," answered Stubbs.

In five minutes Wilson found himself in the prow being rowed out among the very shipping at which a few hours before he had stared with such resentment. What a jackstraw world this had proved itself to him in this last week! It seemed that on the whole he

had had very little to do with his own life, that he was being juggled by some unknown hand. And yet he seemed, too, to be moving definitely towards some unknown goal. And this ultimate towards which his life was trending was inseparably bound up with that of the girl. His heart gave a bound as they swung out into the channel. He felt himself to be close on the heels of Jo. It mattered little what lay in between. The incidents of life counted for nothing so long as they helped him to move step by step to her side. He had come to his own again, — come into the knowledge of the strength within him, into the swift current of youth. He realized that it was the privilege of youth to meet life as it came and force it to obey the impulses of the heart. He felt as though the city behind him had laid upon him the oppressive weight of its hand and that now he had shaken it free.

The color came back once more into the world.

CHAPTER XI

What was Caught

THE man at the oars rowed steadily and in silence with an easy swing of his broad shoulders. He wormed his way in and out of the shipping filling the harbor with the same instinct with which a pedestrian works through a crowd. He slid before ferry boats, gilded under the sterns of schooners, and missed busy launches by a yard, never pausing in his stroke, never looking over his shoulder, never speaking. They proceeded in this way some three miles until they were out of the harbor proper and opposite a small, sandy island. Here the oarsman paused and waited for further orders. Stubbs glanced at his big silver watch and thought a moment. It was still a good three hours before dark. Beyond the island a fair-sized yacht lay at anchor. Stubbs took from his bag a pair of field glasses and leveled them upon this ship. Wilson followed his gaze and detected a fluttering of tiny flags moving zigzag upon the deck. After watching these a moment Stubbs, with feigned indifference, turned his glasses to the right and then swung them in a semicircle about the harbor, and finally towards the wharf they had left. He then

carefully replaced the glasses in their case, tucked them away in the black bag, and, after relighting his pipe, said,

"What 's the use er fishin'?" He added gloomily, "Never catch nothin'."

He glanced at the water, then at the sky, then at the sandy beach which lay just to port.

"Let 's go ashore and think it over," he suggested.

The oarsman swung into action again as silently and evenly as though Stubbs had pressed an electric button.

In a few minutes the bow scraped upon the sand, and in another Stubbs had leaped out with his bag. Wilson clambered after. Then to his amazement, the latter saw the oarsman calmly shove off and turn the boat's prow back to the wharf. He shot a glance at Stubbs and saw that the latter had seen the move, and had said nothing. For the first time he began to wonder in earnest just what sort of a mission they were on.

Stubbs stamped his cramped legs, gave a hitch to his belt, and filled his clay pipe, taking a long time to scrape out the bowl, whittle off a palmful of tobacco, roll it, and stuff it into the bowl with a care which did not spill a speck of it. When it was fairly burning, he swept the island with his keen eyes and suggested that they take a walk.

The two made a circle of the barren acres which made up the island and returned to their starting point with scarcely a word having been spoken. Stubbs

picked out a bit of log facing the ship and sat down. He waved his hand towards the yacht.

"That," he said, "is the craft that 'll take us there — if it don't go down."

"Why don't we go aboard, then?" ventured Wilson.

"'Cause why? 'Cause we 're goneter wait fer the other fishermen."

"I hope they have found as comfortable a fishing-ground as we have."

He studied Stubbs a moment and then asked abruptly,

"What 's the meaning of this fishing story?"

Stubbs turned upon him with a face as blank as the cloudless sky above.

"If I was goneter give a bright young man advice 'bout this very trip," he answered slowly, "it would be not to ask any questions."

"I don't consider it very inquisitive to want to know what I 'm shipping on," he returned with some heat.

"Ye said ye wanted t' git somewhere near Carlina, did n't ye?"

"Yes."

"An' ye said ye did n't care how you gut there so long 's ye gut there."

"Yes," admitted Wilson.

"Well — ye 're on yer way to Carlina now. An' if we ain't blown t' hell, as likely 'nuff we will be, an' if we don't all git our bloomin' throats cut like I dreamed 'bout, er if the ship ain't scuttled as we 'll

have a precious crew who 'u'd do it in a second, we 'll git there."

He paused as though expecting some reply, but already Wilson had lost interest in his query before other speculations of warmer interest.

"In the meanwhile," ran on Stubbs, "'t ain't bad right here. Should n't wonder though but what we gut an old hellion of a thunder shower 'fore long."

"How do you figure that out without a cloud in the sky?"

"Don't figure it out. Don't ever figure nothin' out, 'cause nothin' ever comes out right. Only sech things is jus' my luck."

He puffed a moment at his pipe, and then, removing it, turned to the young man beside him with a renewed interest which seemed to be the result of his meditation.

"See here, m' boy, I 'm thinkin' that if you and I c'uld sorter pull together on this trip it 'u'd be a good thing fer us both. I reckon I 'll need a man or two at my side what I can depend upon, and maybe you 'll find one come in handy, too. Ye 'll find me square, but damned unlucky. As fer you, it 's clear to see you 're square 'nuff. I like a man at the start or I don't like him ever. I like *you*, an' if it 's agreeable we can strike articles of 'greement to pull together, as *you* might say."

Wilson listened in some surprise at this unexpected turn in the attitude of his friend, but he could not

doubt the man's sincerity. He extended his hand at once, responding heartily,

"I 'm with you. We ought to be able to help."

"You 've gotter work a little longer in the dark, m' boy, 'cause it is n't for me to tell another man's business. But I 've looked inter this and so far 's I can see it is all right and above board. It 's onusual an' I 'm not bankin' much on how it 'll come out, but we don't have to worry none over that. Ye 'll have a captain whose got more heart than head maybe, which is diff-'rent from most captains who useter sail down here."

"I 'm willing to take what comes."

"It 's the only way. Wrastle it out each day and, win er lose, forgit it in yer sleep. We all reaches the same port in the end."

The sun beat down warmly on the two men, the blue waves danced merrily before their eyes, and just beyond the good ship rode at anchor, rising and falling rhythmically. Already the city seemed hundreds of miles behind to Wilson, although he had only to turn his head to see it. Whether it was the salt, sea air or the smack of many lands which clung to the man at his side, he felt himself in another world, a world of broader, looser laws.

"In about an hour," drawled Stubbs, "the others will be here. There 'll be all kinds, I expect; some of 'em sober, some of 'em drunk; some of 'em cool, some of 'em scared; some of 'em willing, some of 'em balky. But all of 'em has gotter git aboard that vessel. An' you and me has gotter do it."

"How many?"

"Maybe fifty; maybe more."

"Pretty good handful."

"It would be if we did n't start first. So it 's jus' as well — not that we 're lookin' fer trouble or even expectin' it, as you may say, but jus' to nip trouble in the bud, as the sayin' is, — to look at our weapins."

He drew out his own heavy Colt's revolver, removed the cartridges, tested the hammer, and refilled the chambers. Out of the corner of his eye he watched Wilson to see that he was equally careful. The latter could not help but smile a little. He felt more as though he were on the stage than in real life. To be preparing for as much trouble as though in some uncivilized country, while still within sight of the office buildings of a modern city, seemed an absurdity. Yet here he was, in his sober senses, and at his side sat Stubbs, and, behind, the big chimneys belched smoke, while he thrust one cartridge after another into the bright cylinder of his weapon. But when he looked again at the ocean which lay before him an unbroken plain extending to the shores of other continents, his act and his situation seemed more natural. He was preparing for the things before him, not the life behind. The waters breaking at their feet were brothers to those many thousands of miles distant.

The sun sank lower and lower towards the blue horizon line, finally spattering the sky with color as it sank into the sea as though it had splashed into a

pot of molten gold. Behind them the whistles screamed that work might cease. In front, where there were no roads or paths to cut the blue, the only surface whereon man has not been able to leave his mark since the first created day, a deep peace came down. The world became almost a dream world, so hushed and vague it grew. The yacht which still rocked at anchor grew as dim as a ghost ship. The purple of the sky deepened and the stars came out.

"Look at her now," drawled Stubbs, with a sweep of his hand towards the waters, "like an infant in arms, but afore mornin' reachin' for yer throat, maybe. Next to wimen I don't s'pose there 's anythin' so uncertain and contrary, as you may say."

He raised his field glasses and studied the ship again which lay without lights, like a derelict. He rose lazily and stretched himself.

The light glow in the west disappeared and left the earth but scantily lighted by a new moon. The surface of the water was dark, so that from the shore a rowboat could not be seen for a distance of more than fifty yards. Stubbs strolled towards the place where they had landed and took from his black bag a small lantern which he lighted and, after some searching, placed upon a small, flat rock which he discovered.

"Guess that will fetch 'em 'fore long," he said.

But it was all of half an hour before the first boat came stealing out of the dark like a floating log. At sight of it Stubbs became a different man. He rose to his feet with the quick movement of a boy. His eyes

took in every detail of the contents of the boat before it touched the shore. He was as alert as a watchdog. He turned to Wilson before he started towards this first cargo.

"'Member," he warned, — "jus' one thing to do, — git 'em aboard the ship yonder. If they git scared and balky, tell 'em they gut ter go now. Hol' yerself steady and talk sharp."

The boat, a large fishing dory, scraped the sand. It appeared loaded to the gunwales with the men and their kits. It had scarcely grounded before there was a scramble among the occupants and a fight to get ashore.

But once they had secured their traps, they gathered into a surly group and swore their discontent at the whole expedition. Into the midst of this Stubbs stamped and under pretence of gruff greeting to this one and that, together with much elbowing, broke the circle up into three parts. A dozen questions were shot at him, but he answered them with an assumption of authority that had a wholesome effect. In another minute he had picked out three of the most aggressive men and stationed them at different points on the island to look out for the other boats.

They came rapidly, and within half an hour the list was complete.

Wilson found that he was in about as tough a company as ever stepped out of a pirate story. They had evidently all been chosen with a regard for their physique, for they were all powerfully built men, ranging

in age from twenty to forty. Most of them were only loafers about the wharves. There was not a seafaring man among them, for reasons which later were obvious enough to Wilson. It was clear that few of them were pleased with the first stage of their expedition, but they were forced to take it out in swearing. They swore at the dark, at the cold sea air, at the sand, at their luck, and, below their breath, at Stubbs, who had got them here. Two of them were drunk and sang maudlin songs in each other's arms. But out of the grumbling babel of voices one question predominated.

"Wha' th' hell does this mean?"

Stubbs with a paper in his hand checked off the contents of each boat as it arrived, strode into the heart of every group as it got too noisy, turned aside all questions with an oath or a laugh, and in ten minutes had convinced every man that for the present they were under the whip hand of a master. They quieted down after this and, slouching into the sand, lighted their pipes and waited. Wilson was stationed to overlook the empty boats and see that no one but the oarsmen departed in them.

He took his post with a nonchalance that surprised himself. It was as though he had been accustomed to such incidents all his life. When one of the bullies swaggered down and said with an oath that he'd be damned if he'd have any more of it and lifted one foot into a boat, Wilson touched him lightly upon the shoulder and ordered him back.

The man turned and squared his shoulders for a

blow. But the hand upon his shoulder remained, and even in the dusk he saw that the eyes continued unflinchingly upon him.

"Get back," said Wilson, quietly.

The man turned, and without a word slunk to his place among his fellows. Wilson watched him as curiously as though he had been merely a bystander. And yet when he realized that the man had done his bidding, had done it because he feared to do otherwise, he felt a tingling sense of some new power. It was a feeling of physical individuality — a consciousness of manhood in the arms and legs and back. To him man had until now been purely a creature of the intellect gauged by his brain capacity. Here where the arm counted he found himself taking possession of some fresh nature within him.

"Take the lantern," shouted Stubbs; "go to where we sat and wave it three times, slow like, back and forth."

Wilson obeyed. Almost instantly he saw a launch steal from the ship's side and make directly for the island.

"Now, men," commanded Stubbs, "take your kits, get into fours and march to the left."

With a shove here, a warning there, he moulded the scattered groups into a fairly orderly line. Then he directed them by twos into the small boat from the launch, which had come as far inshore as possible. Wilson stood opposite and kept the line intact. There was no trouble. The launch made two trips, and on

the last Stubbs and Wilson clambered in, leaving the island as deserted as the ocean in their wake. Stubbs wiped his forehead with a red bandanna handkerchief and lighted up his short clay pipe with a sigh of relief.

"So far, so good," he said. "The only thing you can bank on is what 's over with. There 's several of them gents I should hate to meet on a dark night, an' the same will bear steady watchin' on this trip."

He squatted in the stern, calmly facing the clouded faces with the air of a laborer who has completed a good day's work. As they came alongside the ship he instructed each man how to mount the swaying rope ladder and watched them solicitously until they clambered over the side.

Most of them took this as an added insult and swore roundly at it as an imposition.

Wilson himself found it no easy task to reach the deck, but Stubbs came up the ladder as nimbly as a cat. The ship was unlighted from bow to stern, so that the men aboard her moved about like shadows. Wilson was rescued from the hold by Stubbs, who drew him back just as he was being shoved towards the hatch by one of the sailors. The next second he found himself facing a well-built shadow, who greeted Stubbs with marked satisfaction.

"By the Lord," exclaimed the man, "you 've done well, Stubbs. How many did you get in all?"

"Fifty — to a man."

"They looked husky in the dark."

"Yes, they've gut beef 'nuff — but that ain't all that makes a man. Howsomever, they're as good as I expected."

Wilson gasped; the master of this strange craft was no other than Danbury!

CHAPTER XII

Of Love and Queens

FOR a few minutes Wilson kept in the background. He saw that the young man was in command and apparently knew what he was about, for one order followed another, succeeded by a quick movement of silent figures about the decks, a jingle of bells below, and soon the metallic clank of the steam-driven windlass. Shortly after this he felt the pulse beat of the engines below, and then saw the ship, as gently as a maid picking her way across a muddy street, move slowly ahead into the dark.

"Now," said Danbury to Stubbs, "hold your breath. If we can only slide by the lynx-eyed quarantine officers, we 'll have a straight road ahead of us for a while."

"Maybe we 'll do it; maybe we won't."

"You damned pessimist," laughed Danbury. "Once we 're out of this harbor I 'll give you a feed that will make an optimist of you."

The black smoke, sprinkled with golden red sparks from the forced draft, belched from the funnel tops. The ship slid by the green and red lights of other craft with never a light of her own. The three men

stood there until the last beacon was passed and the boat was pointed for the open.

"Done!" exclaimed Danbury. "Now we 'll have our lights and sail like men. Hanged if I like that trick of muffled lights; but it would be too long a delay to be held up here until morning."

He spoke a moment to his mate, and then turned to Stubbs.

"Now," he said, "come on and I 'll make you glad you 're living."

"Just a moment, Cap'n — my mate Wilson."

Danbury turned sharply. In the light which now flooded up from below, he saw Wilson's features quite clearly, but for a moment he could not believe his eyes.

"What the devil ——" he began, then broke in abruptly, "Are you the same one — the fellow in the Oriental robe and bandaged head?"

"The same," answered Wilson.

"The one I took from the crowd and brought home?"

"And clothed and loaned ten dollars, for which he is more thankful than ever."

"But — did you get the girl?"

"Not yet," answered Wilson. "I 'm still after her."

"Well, — but say, come on down."

Danbury led the way into a small cabin so brilliant with the reflection of the electric lights against the spotless white woodwork that it was almost blinding.

But it was a welcome change from the dark and the cool night air and the discomfort of the last few hours. To Wilson it was almost like a feat of magic to have been shifted in an hour from the barren sands of the tiny island to such luxury as this. It took but the first glance to perceive that this young captain had not been limited in resources in the furnishing of his ship. Within the small compass of a stateroom he had compressed comfort and luxury. Yet there was no ostentation or vulgarity displayed. The owner had been guided by the one desire for decent ease and a certain regard for the eye. The left side of the room was occupied by the two bunks made up with the immaculate neatness characterizing all things aboard a good ship. The center of the room was now filled with a folding table set with an array of silver, fine linen, and exquisite glass which would have done credit to the best board in New York. Beneath the group of electric lights it fairly sparkled and glistened as though it were ablaze. The wall to the right was adorned with a steel engraving of a thoroughbred bull pup.

"Now," said Danbury, throwing himself into a chair, "I 'd like to know how in thunder Stubbs got you."

"He did n't — I got Stubbs."

"But where ——"

"On the pier," broke in Stubbs, "where I had gone with the note to your pal — an' may I drop dead if he don't give me the creeps. There I finds this gent — an' I takes 'em where I finds 'em."

"You got the note to Valverde all right?"

"I got the note to your long-legged friend, but — it 's his eyes, man! It 's his eyes! They ain't human! I seen a man like him once what went mad from the heat an' — " he lowered his voice, "they found him at his mate's throat a-sucking of his blood!"

"Don't!" exploded Danbury. "No more of your ghastly yarns! Val is going to be useful to me or — I 'm darned if I could stand him. I don't like him after dark."

"They shines in the dark like a cat's — them eyes does."

"Drop it, Stubbs! Drop it! I want to forget him for a while. That is n't telling me how you chanced ——"

"That 's just it," interrupted Wilson. "It was chance. I was looking for an opportunity to get to Carlina, and by inspiration was led to ask Stubbs. He made the proposition that I come with him, and I came. I had no more idea of seeing you than my great-grandfather. I was going back to thank you, but one thing has followed another so swiftly that I had n't the time."

"I know, I know. But if you really want to thank me, you must tell me all about it some day. If things had n't been coming so fast my own way I should have lain awake nights guessing about you. If I could have picked out one man I wanted on this trip with me I 'd have taken a chance on you. The way you stood off that crowd made a hit with me. I don't know what

sort of a deal you 've made with Stubbs, but I 'll make one of my own with you after dinner. Now about the others. No shanghaiing, was there, Stubbs? Every man knows where he 's going and what he 's hired for?"

"They will afore they 're through."

Danbury's face darkened.

"I 'm afraid you 've been overzealous. I won't have a man on board against his will, if I have to sail back to port with him. But once he 's decided for himself, — I 'll be damned if he turns yellow safely."

"Ye 've gotter remember," said Stubbs, "that they 're a pack er liars, every mother's son of 'em. Maybe they 'll say they was shanghaied; maybe they won't. But I 've got fifty papers to show they 're liars 'cause they 've put their names to th' bottom of every paper."

"And they were sober when they did it?"

"I ain't been lookin' arter their morals or their personal habits," replied Stubbs, with some disgust. "As fer their turnin' yeller — mos' men are yeller until they are afraid not ter be."

"I don't believe it. I don't believe it, — not Americans. And that 's one thing I insisted upon, — they are all Americans?"

"Every mother's son of 'em swore they was. Not bein' present at their birth ——"

"Well, we 'll look 'em over to-morrow and I 'll have a talk with them. I 'm going to put it up to them squarely — good pay for good fighters. By the Lord,

Stubbs, I can't realize yet that we 're actually on the way. Think of it, — in less than a month we 'll be at it! "

The dinner would have done credit to the Waldorf.

It was towards its end that Togo, the Japanese steward, came in with a silver-topped bottle in a pail of ice. He filled the three glasses with the flourish of a man who has put a period to the end of a successful composition. Danbury arose. " Gentlemen," he said, raising his glass, " I have a toast to propose: to Her health and Her throne."

The two men rose, Wilson mystified, and silently drained their glasses. Then there was the tinkle of shivered glass as Danbury, after the manner of the English in drinking to their Queen, hurled the fragile crystal to the floor. Shortly after this Stubbs left the two men to go below and look after his charges. Danbury brought out a bottle of Scotch and a siphon of soda and, lighting his brierwood pipe, settled back comfortably on the bunk with his head bolstered up with pillows.

" Now," he said, " I 'd like to know just as much of your story as you want to tell — just as much as you feel like telling, and not another word. Maybe you 're equally curious about me; if so, I 'll tell you something of that afterwards. There 's pipes, cigars, and cigarettes — take your choice."

Wilson felt that he was under certain obligations to tell something of himself, but in addition to this he really felt a desire to confide in someone. It would be

a relief. The fact remained, however, that as yet he really knew nothing of Danbury and so must move cautiously. He told him of the incident in his life which led to his leaving school, of his failure to find work in Boston, of his adventure in helping the girl to escape, which led to the house. Here he confined himself to the arrival of the owner, of his wound, and of the attack made upon him in the house. He told of his search through the dark house, of the closed cellar door, and of the blow in the head.

"Someone bundled me into a carriage, and I came to on the way to the hospital. It was the next day, after I awoke in my cot and persuaded them to let me out, that I had the good luck to run into you. My clothes had been left in the house and all I had was the lounging robe which I had put on early in the evening."

"But you had your nerve to dare venture out in that rig!"

"I had to get back to the house. The girl did n't know where I had gone, and, for all I knew, was at the mercy of the same madman who struck me."

"That 's right — you had to do it. But honestly, I would rather have met twenty more maniacs in the dark than go out upon the street in that Jap juggler costume of yours. What happened after you left me?"

Wilson told of the empty house, of finding the note, of locating the other house, and finally of the letter and his race for the wharf.

"And then I ran into Stubbs and landed here," he concluded.

"What did Stubbs tell you of this expedition?"

"Nothing — except that we are running to Carlina."

"Yes," sighed Danbury, dreamily, "to Carlina. Well, things certainly *have* been coming fast for you these last few days. And I 'll tell you right now that when we reach Carlina if you need me or any of this crew to help you get the girl, you can count on us. We 've got a pretty good job of our own cut out, but perhaps the two will work together."

He relighted his pipe, adjusted the pillows more comfortably, and with hands clasped behind his head began his own story.

"To go back a little," he said, "father made a pot of money in coffee — owned two or three big plantations down around Rio; but he had no sooner got a comfortable pile together than he died. That 's way back just about as far as I can remember. As a kid I was n't very strong, and so cut out school mostly — got together a few scraps of learning under a tutor, but never went to college. Instead of that, the mater let me knock around. She 's the best ever that way, is the mater — tends to her Bridge, gives me an open account, and, so long as she hears once a month, is happy.

"Last year I took a little trip down to Dad's plantations, and from there rounded the Horn on a sailing vessel and landed way up the west coast in Carlina.

It was just chance that led me to get off there and push in to Bogova. I 'd heard of gold mines in there and thought I 'd have a look at them. But before I came to the gold mines I found something else."

He paused a moment. Then, without a word, rose slowly and, fumbling about a moment in a cedar chest near his bunk, drew out a photograph.

" That 's she," he said laconically.

Wilson saw the features of a girl of twenty, a good profile of rather a Southern cast, and a certain poise of the head which marked her as one with generations of equally good features back of her.

If not decidedly beautiful, she was most attractive, giving an impression of an independent nature enlivened with humor. It seemed to Wilson that she might furnish a very good balance to Danbury.

" You lose the best part of her," said Danbury, reseating himself on the bunk. " You can't see the eyes and ——"

Danbury roused himself and sat on the edge of the bunk leaning far forward, elbows on knees, gazing steadily at Wilson.

" Say, those eyes do keep a fellow up, don't they? I had only to see them once to know that I 'd fight for them as long as I lived. Queer what a girl's eyes — *the* girl's eyes — will do. I 'll never forget that first time. She was sitting in one of those palm-filled cafés where the sun sprinkles in across the floor. She was dressed in black, not a funeral black, but one of those fluffy things that make crêpe look like royal

purple. She had a rose, a long-stemmed rose, in her bodice, and one of those Spanish lace things over her hair. I can see her now, — almost reach out and touch her. I went in and took a table not far away and ordered a drink. Then I watched her out of the corner of my eye. She was with an older woman, and, say — she did n't see a man in that whole room. As far as they were concerned they might have been so many flies buzzing round among the palms. Then a couple of government officers lounged in and caught sight of her. They all know her down there 'cause she is of the blood royal. Her grandmother's sister was the last queen and was murdered in cold blood. Yes, sir, and there were n't men enough there to get up and shoot the bunch who did it. Pretty soon these fellows began to get fresh. She did n't mind them, but after standing it as long as she decently could, she rose and prepared to go out.

"Go out, with an American in the place? Not much! There was a row, and at the end of it they carried the two officers off on a stretcher. Then they pinched me and it cost me $500 to get out.

"But it gave me the chance to meet her later on and learn all about how she had been cheated out of her throne. You see the trouble was that republics had been started all around Carlina, — they grow down there like mushrooms, — so that soon some of these chumps thought they must go and do the same thing, although everything was going finely and they were twice as prosperous under their

queen as the other fellows were under their grafting presidents. Then one of the wild-eyed ones stabbed Queen Marguerite, her grandaunt, you know, and the game was on. Is n't it enough to make your blood boil? As a matter of fact, the whole blamed shooting-match would n't make a state the size of Rhode Island, so it is n't worth much trouble except for the honor of the thing. There is a bunch of men down there who have kept the old traditions alive by going out into the streets and shooting up the city hall every now and then, but they 've mostly got shot themselves for their pains, — which has n't done the princess any good. I studied the situation, and the more I thought of her getting done in this way, the madder I got. So I made up my mind she should have her old throne back. She said she did n't want it, but that was only because she did n't want me to get mixed up in it. At first it did look like a kind of dubious enterprise, but I prowled around and then I discovered a trump card. Up in the hills there is a bunch of wild Indians who have always balked at a republic, mostly because the republic tried to clean them out just to keep the army in practice.

"But the Chief, the Grand Mogul and priest of them all, is this same man Stubbs does n't like — the same who, for some devilish reason of his own chose this particular time to sail for South America. But he is n't a bad lot, this Valverde, though he *is* a queer one. He speaks English like a native and has ways that at times make me think he is half American. But

he is n't — he is a heathen clear to his backbone, with a heathen heart and a heathen temper. When he takes a dislike to a man he 's going to make it hot for him some day or other. It seems that he is particularly sore against the government now because of a certain expedition sent up there a little over a year ago, and because of the loss of a heathen idol which ——"

"What?" broke in Wilson, half rising from his chair. "Is this ——"

"The priest, they all call him. Mention the priest down there and they knew whom you mean."

"Go on," said Wilson, breathing a bit more rapidly.

"Do you know him? Maybe you caught a glimpse of him that day you were at the house. He was there."

"No, I don't know him," answered Wilson, "but — but I have heard of him. It seems that he is everywhere."

"He is a queer one. He can get from one place to another more quickly and with less noise than anyone I ever met. He 's a bit uncanny that way as well as other ways. However, as I said, he 's been square with me and it did n't take us long to get together on a proposition for combining our interests; I to furnish guns, ammunition, and as many men as possible, he to fix up a deal with the old party, do the scheming, and furnish a few hundred Indians. I 've had the boat all ready for a long while, and Stubbs, one of Dad's old skippers, out for men. Yesterday he jumped at me from Carlina, where I thought he was, 10,000 miles

away by sea, and gave the word. Now he is off again on the Columba and is to meet me in Choco Bay."

Danbury relighted his pipe and added between puffs over the match:

"Now you know the whole story and where we 're going. Are you with us?"

"Yes," answered Wilson, "I am with you."

But his head was whirling. Who was this man who struck at him in the dark, and with whom he was now joined in an expedition against Carlina? One thing was sure; that if the priest was on the boat with Sorez it boded ill for the latter. It was possible the girl might never reach Carlina.

"Now for terms. I 'll give you twenty a week and your keep to fight this out with me. Is it a bargain?"

"Yes," answered Wilson.

"Shake on it."

Wilson shook. Danbury rang for the steward.

"Togo — a bottle. We must drink to her health."

CHAPTER XIII

Of Powder and Bullets

DAY after day of the long voyage passed without incident. Danbury and Wilson in the close relationship necessary aboard ship grew to be warm friends. And yet the latter still remained silent concerning that part of his quest relating to the hidden treasure. This was not so much due to any remaining suspicion of Danbury as to the fact that the latter seemed so occupied with his own interests. In fact, he was tempted far more to confide in Stubbs. The latter would be an ideal partner on such a search. As the days passed he became more and more convinced that it would be to his advantage to enlist the services of Stubbs even upon as big a basis as share and share alike.

Danbury trod the decks each day with a light step, and at night relieved his buoyant heart of its dreams to Wilson and of its plans to Stubbs. The latter had spoken once or twice of the necessity of finding something for the men below to do, but Danbury had waved aside the suggestion with a good-natured "Let 'em loaf." But finally their grumblings and complainings grew so loud that Stubbs was forced to take some

notice of it, and so, upon his own responsibility, had them up on deck where he put them through a form of drill. But they rebelled at this and at last reached a condition which threatened to become serious.

"We 've jus' got to find something for them to do," Stubbs informed him.

"They ought certainly to be kept in trim. Don't want them to get flabby."

"'Nother thing, they are livin' too high," said Stubbs. "Salt pork and hardtack is what they needs, — not beefsteak."

"Nonsense, Stubbs. This is n't a slave-ship. Nothing like good fodder to keep 'em in trim. They are getting just what you get at a training table, and I know what that does, — keeps you fit as a king."

"Mebbe so. I 'll tell you what it 'ull do for them, — it 'll inspire 'em to cut our bonny throats some day. The ale alone 'ud do it. Think of servin' ale to sech as them with nothin' to do but sit in the sun. Darned if they ain't gettin' to look as chubby as them babies you see in the advertisements. An' their tempers is growin' likewise."

"Good fightin' spirit, eh?"

"Yes," drawled Stubbs, "an' a hell of a bad thing to have on the high seas."

"Well," said Danbury, after a moment's thought, "you have them up on deck to-morrow and I 'll have a talk with them."

It was Danbury's first opportunity to look over his mercenaries as a whole and he gave a gasp of surprise

at the row after row of villainous faces raised with sneering grins to his. Well in the front squatted "Bum" Jocelin, known to the water-front police for fifteen years, — six feet of threatening insolence; "Black" Morrison with two penitentiary sentences back of him; and "Splinter" Mallory, thin, leering, shifty. And yet Danbury, after he had recovered himself a bit, saw in their very ugliness the fighting spirit of the bulldog. He had not hired them for ornament but for the very lawlessness which led them rather to fight for what they wished than to work for it. Doubtless below their flannel shirts they all had hearts which beat warmly. So he met their gaze frankly and, raising one foot to a capstan, he bent forward with a smile and began. Stubbs stood by with the strained expression of a father who stands helpless watching a son do a foolish thing. On the other hand, Wilson, though he would not have done it himself, rather admired the spirit that prompted the act.

"Men," began Danbury, — and Stubbs choked back an exclamation at his gentleness, — "men, I have n't told you much about the errand upon which you are bound, but I feel now that you ought to know. You signed for two months and agreed to accept your orders from me. You were told there would be some scrapping ——"

"The hell we were," broke in Splinter. Danbury, ignoring the interruption, blandly continued:

"And you were all picked out as men who would n't balk at a bit of a mix-up. But you were n't told what it is all about.

"Well, then, this is the game: down there in Carlina where we are going there is a one-horse republic where they used to have a dinky little kingdom. A republic is all right when it's an honest republic, but this one is n't. It was stolen, and stolen from the finest woman in the world. I 'm going to give you all a chance to see her some day, and I know you 'll throw up your hats then and say the game is worth it, if you don't before."

Their faces were as stolid as though they could not understand a word of what he was saying. But he had lost sight of them and saw only the eyes of the girl of whom he was speaking.

"Once, when she was a little girl, they put her in prison. And it was n't a man's prison either, but a mangy, low-down, dog kennel. Think of it! Put her down there in the dark among the rats. But that was too much for the decent ones of even that crowd, and they had to let her go. So now she lives in a little house in her kingdom, like a beggar outside her own door."

Danbury had worked himself up to a fever pitch. His words came hoarsely and he stepped nearer in his excitement. But as he paused once more, he realized that he was facing a pack of dummies. For a moment he stared at them in amazement. Then he burst out,

"Are you with us, men? Have n't we something worth fighting for — something worth fighting hard for?"

He heard a rough guffaw from a few men in the rear; then a voice:

"It 's the dough we 're out fer — no damned princess."

Danbury whitened. He leaped forward as though to throw himself into the midst of them all, and reached for the throat of the man who had spoken. But Stubbs who had been watching, drew his revolver, and followed close behind. With the aid of Wilson he separated the two and drew off Danbury, while keeping the others at bay.

"Go below," he commanded. "Let me talk to 'em a minute."

"But — but the damned jellyfish — the ——"

Wilson seized his arm and managed to drag him away and down to his cabin. Then Stubbs, with feet wide apart, faced the gang. His voice was low, but they did not miss a word.

"Th' cap'n," he began, "has talked to ye as though ye was white men 'cause he 's young and clean an' does n't know the likes of ye. He hain't had so much to do with a bunch of white-livered, swill-tub jail birds as I have. But don't you go further an' make th' mistake thet 'cause he 's young he ain't a man yet. 'Cause if ye do, ye 'll wake up sudden with a jolt. Even if he did mistake a pack of yaller dogs fer men, don't ye think he does n't know how to handle yaller dogs. But I s'pose ye are jus' as good to shoot at as better. Now I gut ye aboard this craft — me, Stubbs," he pointed to his breast with a thick forefinger, "an' ye 're goneter earn yer grub afore ye 're done."

"Shanghaied — we was shanghaied," ventured Splinter.

"You was, was ye? D' ye think ye could make anyone b'lieve a man in his sober senses would shanghai the likes of you? But howsomever that may be, here you is and here you stays till ye git ashore. Then you has yer chi'ce er gittin' shot in front er gittin' shot behind, — gittin' shot like white men er gittin' shot like niggers. 'Cause I tells you right now thet in all the shootin', I 'll be hangin' round where I can spot the first man who goes the wrong way. An'," he drew his weapon from his pocket, "I can shoot."

He placed a bullet within two inches of the hand of a man who was leaning against the rail. The group huddled more closely together like frightened sheep.

"Now," he concluded, "ye 're goneter git more exercise an' less grub arter this. Tuck it away fer future ref'rence thet th' next time yer cap'n talks to yer ye 'd better show a little life. Now, jus' ter prove ye appreciate what he said, cheer. An' cheer good, ye dogs."

They let out a howl.

"Now back to yer kennels!"

They slunk away, crowding one another in their effort to get from the range of the weapon which Stubbs still carelessly held pointed at their heels.

It was several days after this that Wilson was pacing the deck alone one night rather later than usual. The sky was filled with big, top-heavy clouds which rolled across the purple, blotting out every now and then

the half moon which sprinkled the sea with silver butterflies. The yacht quivered as though straining every timber, but it looked to Wilson a hopeless task ever to run out from under the dark cup and unchanging circumference. It seemed as though one might go on this path through eternity with the silver butterflies ever fluttering ahead into the boundless dark.

He lounged up to Martin at the wheel. The latter, a sturdy, somewhat reserved man, appeared glad to see him and showed evidence of being disturbed about something. He frequently glanced up from the lighted compass before the wheel as though on the point of speaking, but turned back to his task each time, reconsidering his impulse. Finally he cleared his throat and remarked with a fine show of indifference, "Everything been all quiet below, to-day?"

"So far as I know."

"Been down there lately?"

"No; but the men seemed this morning in unusually good form. More cheerful than they've been at all."

"So?"

For a few moments he appeared engrossed in his work, turning the creaking wheel to the right, the left, and finally steadying it on its true course. Wilson waited. The man had said enough to excite his interest and he knew the best way to induce him to talk more freely was to keep silent.

"Happened to go for'ard afore my shift to-night an' I heard some of 'em talkin'. Did n't sound to me like th' sorter talk that 's good aboard ship."

"So? What were they saying?"

Nothin' much," he answered, frightened back into stubborn silence.

"They talk pretty free at all times," returned Wilson. "They have n't learned much about ship discipline."

"I hopes they don't act as free as they talk."

"No fear of that, I guess."

Another long silence. Then Martin asked:

"Where 's the ammunition stowed?"

"We had it moved the other day to the vacant cabins just beyond our quarters."

"All of it?"

"Every cartridge. Why do you ask that, Martin?"

"I happened to go for'ard afore my shift," he repeated.

Wilson arose and stepped to his side.

"See here, if you heard anything unusual, I 'd like to know it before I turn in."

"My business is a-workin' of this wheel, an' what I says is we 've gut a damned bad cargo."

Wilson smiled. After all, it was probably only the constitutional jealousy that always exists between a seaman and a landsman.

"All right, Martin, only we 're all in the same kettle. Keep your ears open, and if you hear anything definite let me know."

"Then I says I puts my chest agin my door afore I sleeps an' I watches out for shadows when I 'm at the wheel."

"And have you seen any to-night?"

"No, an' I hopes I won't."

"All right. Good night."

"Good night, sir."

Wilson stepped out of the pilot-house and made a short round of the ship. He even ventured down to the forward hold, but all was as quiet there as ever. He turned towards his own cabin. Danbury's light was out. Beyond he saw the form of the first mate who had been posted there to guard the ammunition. He spoke to him and received a cordial reply.

"All quiet?"

"All quiet, sir."

The door of Stubbs' cabin was closed, and he heard within his heavy snoring. He entered his own cabin and closed the door. But he felt uneasy and restless. Instead of undressing he threw himself down on the bunk, after placing his pistol underneath his pillow. Martin's talk had been just suggestive enough to start his brain to working, disturbed as he was by so many other things. He had an impulse to rouse Stubbs. He wanted someone with whom to talk. He would also have been more comfortable if he had been able to make sure that those bits of parchment were still safe in his comrade's chest, where he had locked them. If the crew once got even a suspicion that there was on board such a golden chance as these offered, it would be a temptation difficult for even better men to resist. He realized that if they were able sufficiently to surrender each his own selfish individual

desires and organize compactly under a single leader, they would form an almost irresistible force. But of course the key to the whole situation lay in the ammunition. Without this they were helpless. Knives and clubs could not resist powder and bullet. He became drowsy finally and his thoughts wandered once more to the treasure and then to Jo until his eyes closed and, though his lips still remained tense, he slept.

He was awakened by the sound of a muffled fall in the next cabin. He sprang to his feet, seizing his weapon. The electric light wire had been cut so that the cabin was in suffocating darkness. By some instinct he forced himself flat against the wall by the door. The next second the door was flung open and two forms hurled themselves with a grunt upon the bunk. He fired twice and darted out into the passageway. Here all was confusion, but all was dark. Man fell against man with oaths and wild threshing of the arms, but they all knew one another for friends. He was for the moment safe. The doors to the cabins of Stubbs and Danbury were wide open. He knew that either they had escaped by some such miracle as his, or that they were beyond help. It seemed to him that there was but one thing to do, make the deck and collect whatever honest men were left. The mutineers were still fighting with one another and had grown so panic-stricken that they were making little progress towards their goal. Quick action might even now save the ship. He heard a voice raised in a vain endeavor to control them.

"Steady, boys, steady! Wait till we get a light."

At the head of the stairs leading to the deck he found a sentinel. He struck at him and then grappled. The two rolled on the deck, but the struggle was brief. Wilson soon had him pinned to the deck. He raised the fellow's head and threw him with all his strength backwards. The man lay very still after this.

When he rose to his feet the deck was as deserted as though nothing at all unusual were going on below. He rushed to the pilot-house. The ship swerved tipsily and then the engines ceased their throbbing. Martin lay limply over his wheel. The cutthroats had got below to the engines.

For a moment his head whirled with twenty impossible plans. Then he steadied himself. There was but one thing to do; the gang was evidently so far in control of the ship as to prevent aid from the crew; Danbury and Stubbs were doubtless unconscious, if not dead, and he was left, the one man still free to act. Once the rifles were loaded a hundred men could not control this crowd, but before then — one man with a loaded weapon and with his wits about him, might make himself master.

He groped his way down the stairs and into the midst of the tumult. No one had as yet obtained a light. The leader had succeeded in partly controlling his gang, but one man had only to brush the shoulder of another to start a fight. David elbowed through them, striking right and left in the endeavor to stir up anew the panic. He succeeded instantly. In

two minutes pandemonium reigned. Then a man scrambled in with a lantern and was greeted with a cheer. Wilson turned, shot twice, and ducked. The cabin was once more in darkness and confusion.

"Wha' th' hell?" roared Splinter.

Wilson plunged on until he stood facing the door which still barred the way to the cartridges. It was intact. At this point someone reached his side with an axe. Snatching it from the fellow's hand he himself swung it against the lock. He had two things in mind; the act would turn away suspicion, and once within the small room, with his back to the cartridges, he could take the men one by one as they pressed through the narrow door. He had on his cartridge belt and ought to be able, not only to keep them at bay until possible aid arrived from the crew's quarters, but might even be able to start sufficient panic to drive them out altogether. Wilson swung a couple of times until the lock weakened. Splinter shouted:

"Fer Gawd's sake, don't act like frightened rats! Keep cool now an' we have 'em."

One more blow and the door fell. With a jump Wilson scrambled in and, turning, fired four times in rapid succession. In the pause which ensued he refilled his weapon. There was a chorus of ugly growls and a concerted movement towards the door. He shot again, aiming low and relying as much on the flash and noise to frighten them as on actual killing. To those without it sounded as though there might be several

men. No one knew but what the man next to him had turned traitor. They groped for one another's throats and finally, as though by one impulse, crowded for the exit. They fought and pounded and kicked at each other. It was every man for himself and the Devil take the hindmost. Wilson helped them along by continued shooting — aiming high and low. In five minutes the cabin was cleared save for the wounded, who managed, however, to drag themselves out of sight.

As Wilson fell back exhausted and half choked from the smoke with which the room was filled, he heard the bark of pistols above and knew that the crew had reached the deck. He waited only long enough to recover strength to walk, and then moved cautiously forward. He was undisturbed. The mutineers had gone, to the last man able to stand. He groped his way to Danbury's cabin and his hand fell upon a limp form in the bunk. But even as he recoiled the man moved and muttered feeble queries.

"Are you safe, Danbury?" gasped Wilson.

"What — what 's the trouble? Give me a drink — brandy."

Wilson turned to the wine closet just beyond the bunk and drew out the first bottle his fingers touched. He placed it to Danbury's lips, and the latter took several deep swallows of it, spitting indignantly as he thrust it away.

"Darned stuff — Martini cocktails. But — but ——"

Wilson found himself laughing. Nothing Danbury

could have said would so prove the inconsequence of his injuries. It relieved his strained nerves until, in reaction, he became almost hysterical.

"What 's the joke?" demanded Danbury, rising to a sitting posture and feeling at the cut in the back of his head. "Where 's the lights? What has happened?"

"A bit of a fight. Can you make your feet?"

Danbury groped for the side of the bunk, and with the help of Wilson stood up. He was at first dizzy, but he soon came to himself.

"If you can walk, come on. I want to look for Stubbs."

Wilson groped his way into the smoke-filled passageway and across to the other cabin. They found Stubbs lying on the floor unconscious. A superficial examination revealed no serious wound and so, urged on by the increasing noise above, they left him and hurried to the deck. They found the second mate pushing the stubborn group nearer and nearer their own quarters. He was backed by only two men armed with knives and clubs. The gang was hesitating, evidently tempted to turn upon the tiny group, but with the appearance of Wilson and Danbury they pressed at once for the narrow opening.

At sight of them Danbury completely lost his head. It was as though he then first realized what had actually been attempted. He raised his weapon and was upon the point of shooting into their midst when Wilson knocked up his hand and sent the revolver

spinning across the deck. But Danbury scarcely looked around to see who had foiled him. He rushed headlong into the group as though he were the center of a football team. He struck right and left with his naked fists and finally by chance fell upon Splinter. The two rolled upon the deck until the mate stooped and picked up Splinter bodily and, raising him above his head, fairly hurled him like a bag of grain down the ladder after the last of the mutineers.

Danbury, in spite of his loss of blood, held himself together wonderfully. For the next hour all were busy, and between them placed Splinter in irons, and crowded the mutineers, a cowed lot, into the forward hold. They found Stubbs still unconscious, but he came around after a good swig of brandy. He rose to his elbow and blinked dazedly at Danbury.

"What 's the trouble?" he demanded.

"Mutiny," answered Danbury, briefly.

"And me laid up, an' outer it. Jus' my pizen luck," he growled.

CHAPTER XIV

In the Shadow of the Andes

AS soon as lights were secured an examination of the battle ground was made. Four men were found, three of them with leg wounds which did no more than cripple them, and one with a scalp wound made by a grazing bullet which had knocked him unconscious. There was no surgeon aboard, but one of the mates had a good working knowledge of surgery and cleaned and dressed the wounds.

As soon as it was daylight Stubbs had a talk with the mutineers.

"'Course," he informed them, "'course ye knows the medicine ye gets fer mutiny on the high seas. Every yeller dog of ye can look forard to a prison sentence of twenty years or so. As for Splinter — yer leader — I can 'member the time I 'd ha' had the pleasure er watchin' him squirm from a yardarm without any further preliminaries. As 't is, maybe he 'll be 'lowed to think it over th' rest of his life in a cell."

He kept them on a diet of crackers and corned beef and they never opened their lips in protest. Every day they were brought up morning and afternoon for drill. After this the three men divided the night into

the three shifts so that at least one of them was always upon guard. But the men were thoroughly cowed, and evidently hoped, by good behavior, to reëstablish themselves before port was reached.

It was during these night watches that Wilson had many long talks with Stubbs — talks that finally became personal and which in the end led him, by one of those quick impulses which make in lives for a great deal of good or wrecking harm, to confide in him the secret of the treasure. This he did at first, however, without locating it nearer than "Within five hundred miles of where we 're going," and with nothing in his narrative to associate the idol with the priest. Truth to tell, Wilson was disappointed at the cool way in which Stubbs listened. But the latter explained his indifference somewhat when he remarked, removing the clay pipe from his mouth:

"M' boy, I 'm sorter past my treasure hunting days. Once't I dug up 'bout an acre of sand on one of the islands of the South seas an' it sorter took all th' enthusiasm, as ye might say, fer sech sport outern me. We did n't git nothin' but clam shells, as I remember. Howsomever, I would n't git nothin' but clam shells outern a gold mine. Thet 's th' way m' luck runs. Maybe th' stuff 's there, maybe it ain't; but if I goes, it ain't."

He added, a moment later:

"Howsomever, I can see how, in order to find the girl, you has to go. The dago gent — if he lives — will make fer that right off. I 've heern o' women with

the gift o' conjurin' — like seventh sons o' seventh sons — but I ain't ever met with sech. I dunno now — I dunno now but what I might consider your proposition if we comes outern this right and the cap'n here can spare me. I can't say this minute as how I takes much stock in it, as ye might say. But I tell ye fair, I 'm glad to help a pardner and glad to have a try, fer the sake of the girl if nothin' more. I don't like ter see an older man play no sech games as this man — who d' ye say his name is? "

" Sorez."

" Maybe we can find out more 'bout him down here. Anyhow, we 'll talk it over, boy, when we gits through this. In the meanwhile yer secret is safe."

Wilson felt better at the thought that there was now someone with whom he could talk freely of the treasure. It became the main topic of conversation during the watch which he usually sat out with Stubbs, after his own.

The ship's log of the remainder of this long journey would read as uninterestingly as that of an ocean liner. Day succeeded day, and week followed week, with nothing to disturb the quiet of the trip. A stop was made at Rio for coal, another after rounding the Horn (here they did not have the excitement of even high seas), and another halfway up the West coast. But at these places not a man was allowed to leave the ship, Danbury, Wilson, and Stubbs themselves remaining on board in fear of a possible attempt on the part of the mercenaries to land.

As a matter of fact, the latter were thoroughly frightened and did their best by good behavior to offset the effect of their attempt. They were obedient at drills, respectful to all, and as quiet as the crew itself. This was as Stubbs had anticipated, but he on his side gave no sign of relenting in the slightest until the day before they sighted Choco Bay, where the landing was to be made. On the contrary, by dark hints and suggestions he gave them to understand that certain of them — and no one knew who was included in this generality — stood actually in danger of prison sentences. So they outdid one another in the hope of reinstating themselves. At the conclusion of what was to be their last drill Stubbs called them to attention and sprung the trap to which he had been gradually leading them. He studied them with a face heavy with clouds.

"We are nearing our port," he drawled, "an' some of you are nearin' the jail. An' a jail in these diggin's, my beauties, is a thing that ain't no joke, 'cause they shets you up below ground where ye has only your natural frien's the rats fer playmates, — rats as big as dogs an' hungry as sharks, as ye might say. Sometimes the cap'n of these here ports fergits ye — 'specially if they 's frien's er mine. If they thinks of it, they brings yer sour bread an' water an' yer fights the rats fer it; if they fergits, as they has a way er doin', you jus' stay there until the rats gits stronger than you. Then, little by little, yer goes. But they buries yer bones very partic'lar, if they finds any. They takes their time in this country, they takes their time."

Several of the men in the rear huddled closer to one another. One or two in the front row wiped the back of their hands over their brows.

"They can't take 'Merican citizens," growled someone.

"No, they can't — wuss luck for the 'Merican citizens. The others stand some show — but 'Merican citizens don't stand none. 'Cause they shets yer up without a hearin' and communicates with the consul. The consul is drunk mostly an' devilesh hard to find an' devilesh slow to move. But the rats ain't, — Lord, no, the rats ain't. They is wide awake an' waitin'."

A big man in the rear shouldered his way to the front.

"See here, Capn," he blurted out, "I 've had a talk with some of the men, an' we don't want none er that. We 've done wrong, maybe, but, Gawd, we don't want thet. Give us a show, — give us a fightin' show. We 'll go where you say and we 'll fight hard. We were n't used to this sorter thing an' so it comes a bit tough. But give us a show an' we 'll prove what we can do."

He turned to the band behind him.

"Wha' d' yer say, fellers? Is this on the level?"

"Sure! Sure! Sure!"

The cry came heartily.

Stubbs thought a moment.

"Is this here another little game?" he asked. "Once yer git on land are yer goin' ter turn yeller agin?"

"No! No! No!"

"'Cause it won't do yer no good, anyhow. Now I tell yer — the cap'n an' I had a talk over this an' I was fer lettin' yer take yer medicine an' pickin' up another bunch. Men is cheap down here. But he says, 'No; if they 'll act like white men, give 'em a show. I want to git this princess with 'Mericans an' I want to show these fellers what 'Mericans can do behin' a rifle.' Our game is to git to Carlina and lick the bunch of Guinnies thet has stolen the young lady's throne. If ye wanter do thet an' do it hard and square — well, he 's fer lettin' this other thing drop. Fight an' yer gits cash 'nuff to keep drunk fer a year; squeal an' yer gits shot in the back without any more talk. There 's a square offer — do ye take it like men?"

"Sure! Give us a show!"

"Then three cheers fer yer cap'n — Cap'n Danbury."

This time the cheers were given with a will, and the boat rang with the noise.

"Now then, lay low an' take yer orders. An' I wish yer luck."

"Three cheers fer Cap'n Stubbs," shouted someone.

And as Stubbs bashfully beat a hasty retreat, the cheers rang lustily in his ears.

But he reported to Danbury with his face beaming.

"Now," he said, "ye 've gut some men worth something. They 'll be fightin' fer themselves — fightin' to keep outern jail. Mutiny has its uses."

The next morning the anchor clanked through blue

waters into golden sand and the throbbing engines stopped.

The land about Choco Bay is a pleasant land. It is surpassed only by the plains along the upper Orinoco where villages cluster in the bosom of the Andes in a season of never changing autumn. Nearer the coast the climate is more fitful and more drowsy. One wonders how history would have been changed had the early Puritans chanced upon such rich soil for their momentous conquering, instead of the rock-ribbed, barren coast of New England. The same energy, the same dauntless spirit, the same stubborn clinging to where the foot first fell, if expended here, would have gained for them and their progeny a country as near the Garden of Eden as any on earth. But perhaps the balmy breezes, the warming sun, the coaxing sensualism of Nature herself would have wheedled them away from their stern principles and turned them into a nation of dreamers. If so, what dreamers we should have had! We might have had a dozen more Keatses, perhaps another Shakespeare. For this is a poet's land, where things are only half real. The birds sing about Choco Bay.

Rippling through the blue waters after dark, the yacht glided in as close to the shore as possible. The morning sun revealed a golden semicircle of sand rimming the turquoise waters of the bay. Across the blue sky above seagulls skimmed and darted and circled; so clear the waters beneath that the clean bottom showed like a floor of burnished gold. The harbor proper lay

ten miles beyond, where a smaller inlet with deeper soundings was protected from the open inrush of the sea by the promontory forming one tip of this broader crescent. Far, very far in the distance the lofty Andes raised their snowy crests — monarchs which, Jove-like, stood with their heads among the clouds. So they had stood while kings were born, fought their petty fights, died, and gave place to others; so they stood while men contended for their different gods; so they stood while men loved and followed their loves into other spheres. It was these same summits upon which Wilson now looked which had greeted Quesada, and these same summits at which Quesada had shaken his palsied fist. It was these same summits which but a short while before must have greeted Jo; it was possible that at their very base he might find her again, and with her a treasure which should make her a queen before men. It made them seem very intimate to him.

CHAPTER XV

Good News and Bad

THOUGH Wilson had listened with interest enough to the plans of the present campaign as outlined to him by Danbury, it must be confessed that he was still a bit hazy about the details. He understood that three interests were involved; those of the Revolutionary party, who under General Otaballo were inspired by purely patriotic motives in their desire to see the present government overthrown; those of Danbury, who was governed by more sentimental considerations, and, finally, those of the priest, who was prompted by revenge. General Otaballo was the last of one of those old families of Carlina who had spent their lives in the service of the family of Montferaldo. His grandfather, to go back no further, had died defending the last reigning queen, his father had been shot for leading a conspiracy to restore the family, and now the grandson was following in the old way. He was an old man now and had missed death a hundred times by narrow margins owing to his connection with just such enterprises as this. This was to be his last stand and into it he was throwing his heart and soul and to his standard gathering whatever forces he could win by hook or crook. It

was he who had heard of Danbury and it was he who had prompted him to bargain with the priest. With a record of past defeats he himself had lost prestige with the hill people. And yet both the priest and Danbury turned to him now to manage the campaign. He knew the people, he knew every detail of the Republican army, every particular of the forts and other defenses, and every traitor in their ranks.

To take Carlina it was necessary only to capture Bogova, its capital. This city of some 20,000 inhabitants lay about the inner port and some eight miles from the bay where Danbury's yacht now rode at anchor, safely, because of the treachery of the harbor patrol, who to a man were with the Revolutionists. Danbury had been instructed by Otaballo, through the priest, to make this harbor and remain until receiving further instructions. The latter came within three hours in the form of two letters; one from the General, and the other, enclosed, from the princess herself. Danbury tore open the letter before glancing at the official communication. He read it through and then stood with it in his hand looking dreamily out across the blue waters. He whistled to himself. Then handing it to Wilson, he asked,

"What do you think of that?"

Wilson read,

"DEAR DICK:

I hope you have thought over what I said to you and have n't planned to do anything foolish. Because, honestly, it can't do any good. The old people are

gone and with them the old cause. But I have heard rumors on all sides until I am nearly frightened to death about what you may have stirred up. When General Otaballo stole in this morning and showed me beneath his coat that old uniform I knew something serious was meant.

And, Dicky, I don't want to be a queen — even to get revenge upon the cads who have n't been nice. I don't want to rule; it's more bother than it's worth; I'm afraid the royal blood has got pretty well thinned out in me, for I don't feel any thrill stirring within at the war-cry, — only trembles. I want to jog along the same old peaceful path and I want you to come and see me like the dear good friend you've always been. And if you've got your pockets full of pistols, and your hands full of swords, throw them away, Dicky, and just jump into a carriage and come up and have supper with me. I've really been lonesome for you, — more, to be honest, than I thought I'd be or than I like to be. It's the woman and not the queen who has been lonesome, too. So be a good boy and don't get either of us into trouble, but bring the general to tea with you. We can fight it all out just as well over the cakes and no one the wiser.

Yours,
BEATRICE."

Wilson smiled.

"I should think," he said, "that it might be pleasant to — take supper with her."

Danbury spoke earnestly.

"But a man can't sit and eat cakes while such as she is insulted on her own streets. A man can't drink tea with her — he must be up and doing for her. I shall take supper with her when she is a queen in her own kingdom."

"She does n't seem to want to be queen."

"But she shall," he exclaimed, "by the grace of God, she shall, within two days!"

He tore open the missive from General Otaballo, and read aloud the instructions. But not until the last paragraph did Wilson learn anything of moment. Then, in a second his whole attitude towards the campaign was changed.

"In addition to your present interest in this movement, I have news that ought to spur your men on to added effort; the dogs of Republicans have arrested and imprisoned an American young lady, who reached here on the Columba in company with Dr. Sorez. The latter, though formerly a loyal Republican, has for some reason been thought in league with us, though, as far as I know, he is not. But the girl is the victim of the arbitrary and unjust persecution which has always been meted out to foreigners."

Wilson was left dumb for a moment. But his mind soon grasped the urgency of the situation. He placed his hand upon Danbury's arm.

"Danbury," he said quietly, "I 've got to get to her."

"You don't mean to say that this is ——"

"The same one. Evidently Sorez has got her into trouble."

"But this is serious — this imprisonment. The dungeons are n't fit for a dog."

"I know," answered Wilson; "but we 'll get her out."

"We can't, until we batter down the old prison. *They* won't let her out — not for us."

"But why should they shut her up? What possible excuse can they have? It's outrageous. If we can reach the authorities ——"

"We'll be locked up too. The authorities would be glad to have you come within reach. No, their suspicions are aroused, and to make a move towards her release would be only to excite them to do worse. You'll have to wait ——"

"That's impossible. Wait, with her in the hands of those ruffians!"

"Wait until we get the ruffians in our hands. Otaballo plans the attack for early to-morrow; we ought to be in the city by noon. Once the place is ours you can take a force of men and go through the jail; I imagine that it is in the old palace. That is where I was locked up overnight, at any rate; and if it is like that ——"

Wilson glanced up swiftly, his face pale.

"It was bad?"

"It was worse than that. But maybe they have a better place for the women."

The remainder of the day was a nightmare to Wilson. He paced the decks until in weariness he dropped into his bunk. Both Danbury and Stubbs kept a watch upon him for fear that he might attempt to go ashore on some wild project for reaching the city. He scarcely slept an hour that night and went with the first boat load to leave the ship.

A full moon lighted the beach like a colorless sun. He stood with the silent group handling their Win-

chesters. There was not one of them, even though he peered somewhat anxiously into the deep shadows by the roadside, who did not feel more of a man now that he was on shore; this, even with the prospect of danger ahead. They were essentially landsmen — a thing which Stubbs had not understood. They looked upon the ship only as a prison. Now, with their feet on firm ground, they were a different lot of men. Few of them were actual cowards, and still fewer of them objected to the prospective fight, even though they had been drawn into it in what they considered an underhanded way. But the real reason for their good humor lay deeper, so deep that not one man had dared as yet whisper it to another, although each knew the other to be of the same mind. This was the prospect of loot. Whichever side won, there would be a fine confusion in a lawless city, with opportunities galore for plunder.

Most of them had vague notions that these South American cities were fabulously rich in gold. Consequently, if they could not be depended upon afterwards, they could be trusted to do their best to make the city, and to fight so long as their own security was in jeopardy. To rebel before they got there would only place them between two fires, and they feared Stubbs too well to attempt it even if there was a chance. So, take them all in all as they stood there upon dry land, they were about as fair a fighting lot as mercenaries ever average.

The last thing to be brought from the boat was the ammunition, and this was not distributed until the

only method left of reaching the ship was by swimming. Wilson sat upon the boxes with a revolver in each hand until the last boat left the shore. Then Stubbs broke open the boxes and made his final speech to the men who in a way he was now placing without his authority.

"Afore I gives you these," he began, "I wants to remind yer of the little talk we had t' other night. Each man of yer gits fifty cartridges and with them either he makes Bogova er Hell. There ain't no other stoppin' places. Ye may have thought, some of ye, that once yer rifles was loaded ye could do 'bout as ye pleased. But t'ain't so. Jus' behin' you there 'll march one hundred men from the hills. They don't know much, but they obey orders, an' their orders is to shoot anybody what ain't goin' our way. Ye 've got a chance, marchin' straight on an' takin' the city; ye ain't gut the ghost of a chance, if ye don't take the city er if ye fergits the way and starts back towards the ship. 'Nother thing; hold tergether. It ain't pleasant fer a man caught by hisself in Bogova. Thet 's all, gents, an' I hopes it will be my pleasant duty to hand ye soon a five-dollar gold piece fer every-one of these here things I now hands ye."

Wilson suppressed a shout, and soon there was the confused clicking of the locks as they closed over the full chambers of the rifles. It was music to the ears of Danbury, who from the moment his feet had touched shore was impatient to take the road without further delay. Wilson was just as bad, if not worse,

which left Stubbs really the only man of them all able to think calmly and somewhat rationally.

He formed the men into columns of two, hastily inspected each one of them, and finally got them started with Danbury and the guide leading, Wilson, on the right side, and himself on the left and well to the rear where he could watch for possible desertions until the hill men took their place behind them. It was a new world for them all; the strange tropical foliage silhouetted against the vivid night sky, the piercing perfume of new flowers, and the shadow jungle either side made it seem almost unreal. At the junction of this forest path and the main road the hill men fell in behind like ghosts. They were brown, medium-sized men, dressed in cotton trousers and blouses. They were without shoes or hats and were armed with a medley of weapons, from modern rifles to the big, two-edged sword with which their ancestors fought. Save under the leadership of the priest, they were said not to be good fighters, but with him to spur them on they became veritable demons, hurling themselves upon the enemy with a recklessness only possible to religious fanatics. So fiercely had they resisted the attack made upon them in the expedition of the hills that it was said that not within ten years would it be possible to organize again sufficient men with courage to venture to cross the Andes.

The road turned and twisted, wandered up hill and down, beckoning them on through this phantasmal world which but for them would have slept on in

aromatic peace. To Wilson this all seemed part of a dream. It was one of those strange visions he had seen between the stars that night after the crash when he had gazed from his study window. Somehow it did not seem to belong in his life at all. The girl did, but nothing else did. It was meant for him to have her, but in the usual ruts of men.

This was some other self which, with holsters and cartridge belt, was marching in the dark with this group of uncouth men. The only thing that made it real was the fact that he was moving towards her. Once he had found her he would go back again and seek his place in the vast machine which weaved cloths of more sober fabric. Then he thought of the map which he had taken from the chest and put into his pocket. That, too, was a part of this dream. It was fitting that in such an atmosphere as this there should be hidden gold and jewels; fitting, too, that this new self of his should be in search of them. But if only he could reach her, if only he could have her fairly within his arms, he would give this up to others who had more need of it. She had said that if ever she were in need of him, she would call and he would come to her. That seemed like an idle phrase at the time, and yet it had come true. She had called and he was now on his way to give her aid. He could not imagine her in the dungeon.

At the end of two hours, a rifle shot spat through the dark branches by the roadside. Then silence — a silence so unbroken that it seemed in a minute as

though the noise had never been. Then Otaballo rode up at a gallop and gave a few orders. His men, who led the forces, divided silently and disappeared each side of the road into the dark timber. Then for another half hour the remainder of the men marched on as before. The sky began to brighten in the east. A grayish pink stole from the horizon line and grew ever brighter and brighter as though a breeze were blowing into the embers of an ash-covered fire. The pink grew to crimson and with it the shadows sought their deeper haunts. As the first real beams of the sun shot above the distant hills the angular jumble of distant roof-tops became silhouetted against the clear, blue sky.

A messenger came galloping down the road with orders for Danbury.

"You are to enter by the East Road. Follow your guide."

The sputtering report of distant rifles came to their ears.

"But, see here," protested Danbury, "the fighting is straight ahead."

"Take your orders," advised Wilson. "There will be enough of that to go around, I guess."

The rattle directly ahead acted like wine upon Danbury. Wilson heard him shout.

"All right, men. Let 's take it at double-quick."

But the men could not stand the pace he cut out and so he was forced to fall back to stubborn marching. Their path swung to the right, and past many strag-

gling houses where the good housewives were just up and kindling their fires, with no inkling of what was about. To them nothing was ahead but the meagre routine of another day. Occasionally they caught a glimpse of the passing men and returned, startled, to drag out their sleepy spouses and all the children. The sun had warmed the whole of this little world now and trees and houses stood out clean and distinct as though freshly washed. To the left the dry crackle of the rifles still sounded. It was evident that Otaballo had met with a good-sized force and one evidently prepared. It was not long before the road took them into the city proper. Before they had reached the first paved street Danbury turned to his men.

"Now, come on at a jump. There is a five-hundred-dollar bonus to the first man in the palace."

He drew a revolver from his holster and, spurring on the guide, encouraged the men to a double-quick. Wilson kept by his side. They ran through the silent streets like phantom ghouls in a deserted city. Every window was tight shut and every door double-barred. The rumor had spread fast and entered the city an hour before them. They made a great rattling as they ran heavily down the narrow alleys and through the silent squares, but they received no more attention than a party of merry-makers returning in the small hours from some country dance. Then they rounded a corner and — a blinding flash from a red line of rifles checked their brisk progress. Wilson staggered back a few steps with his hand over his eyes like a

man hit beneath the chin. The noise was deafening. Then he turned slowly in a daze and looked to see what the men were doing. A half dozen of them had lain down as though to sleep, sprawled out in curiously uncomfortable attitudes. The others had paused a moment as if in doubt.

Their frightened eyes brought him to himself.

"Come on," he growled. "Shoot low and fast."

A group of the real fighters swept past to the accompaniment of biting snaps like the explosion of firecrackers. Then he fought his way to the front again, elbowing men to one side.

The thing that seemed remarkable to him was that he could face that spitting red line of rifles and yet keep his feet. They must be poor shots, he thought. He himself began to shoot rather deliberately. He did not see the faces of the men at whom he shot, for he always aimed at their breasts. Once, however, he took careful aim at a white face which lay against the breech of a rifle leveled at him. He aimed for the white space between the eyes quite as coolly as though he were facing a target. Yet he jumped a little in surprise as, following his report, he saw a blotch of red appear where he had aimed — saw it for just a second before the man reeled forward heavily and sunk as though he had no backbone.

The powder smoke choked him, but he loved it. He liked the smell of it and the taste of it, because it led to her. He lost all sense of personalities. The forms before him were not men. He forgot all about his com-

rades; forgot even what it was all about, except that he was hewing a path to her. It was just a noisy medley in which he had but one part to play, — shoot and press on to the dungeon which confined her.

CHAPTER XVI

The Priest Takes a Hand

HOW long this continued — this pressing forward, following the spitting fire of his hot rifle — Wilson could not tell. From the first he could make nothing out of the choking confusion of it all, finding his satisfaction, his motive, his inspiration in the realization that he was adding the might of his being to the force which was pounding the men who had dared to touch this girl. He was drunk with this idea. He fought blindly and with the spirit of his ancestors which ought long since to have been trained out of him. So foot by foot he fought his way on and knew it not when brought to a standstill. Only when he found himself being pressed back with the mass did he realize that something had happened; reënforcements had arrived to the enemy. But this meant only that they must fight the harder. Turning, he urged the men to stand fast. They obeyed for a moment, but the increased force was too many for them; they were steadily beaten back. For a second it looked as though they were doomed to annihilation, for once they were scattered among those narrow streets they would be shot down like dogs. At this point

Wilson became conscious of the presence of a gaunt figure, dressed in a long, black robe, bearing upon back and chest in gold embroidery the figure of a blazing sun.

He stood in front of the men a second gazing up at the sky. Even the enemy paused to watch him. Then turning to the hill men who had wavered in the rear, he merely pointed his outstretched arm towards the enemy. The effect was instantaneous; they swept past the mercenaries, swept past Wilson, yelling and screaming like a hoard of maniacs. They waved queer knives and spears, brandished rifles, and then, bending low, charged the frightened line of rifles before them. Wilson paused to look at this strange figure. He recognized him instantly as the priest of whom he had heard so much and who had played in his own life of late so important a part. The man was standing stock still, smiling slightly. Then with some dignity he moved away never even looking back, as confident of the result as though he were an instrument of Fate. If he had seen the man he had struck down in the house of Sorez, he gave no evidence of it. And once again Wilson found himself moving on steadily towards the old palace.

The men from the hills swept everything from before them; the superstitious enemy being driven as much by their fear as by the force of the attack. Behind them came the mercenaries to the very gates of the palace. Here they were checked by a large oaken door. From the windows either side of this puffs of smoke,

fire-pierced, darted viciously. The men behind Wilson answered, but their bullets only flattened against the granite surface of the structure. He realized that this was to be the centre of the struggle. They must carry this at any cost. He heard oaths in the rear and turned to see Stubbs whipping on three men who were dragging the small Gatling gun brought from the ship. It looked like a toy. As Stubbs stooped to adjust it, Wilson saw one of the men dart from the line and disappear into the open doorway of a house to the right. Stubbs saw it, too, and now, suddenly turning, put two shots at the fellow's heels. Then he turned to the gun, with a warning to the others. But he never finished it. He sank to the street. Danbury rushed up from somewhere and bent over him, but Stubbs was already getting to his feet.

"Damned thing only glanced," he growled, putting his hand to his head, "but — it came from behind!"

As he faced the men for a second, one man slunk back into the rear. Wilson raised his revolver, but Stubbs pushed it to one side.

"Later," he said.

The gun was wheeled into place and it became the center for all the firing from the palace. In a few seconds it was pouring a steady stream of lead into the oaken door and splintering the lock into a hundred pieces. With a howl the men saw the barrier fall and pressed on. Danbury led them, but halfway he fell. Forty men swarmed over him.

Once within the palace walls, Wilson and Stubbs

found their hands full. They realized as they charged through the outer guardroom and down the dark, oak-furnished hall that this gang at their heels would be difficult to control within the intricate mazes of this old building. But their attention was soon taken from this by a volley from the antechamber to the right which opened into the old throne room. The men rallied well and followed at their heels as they pressed through the door. They found here some twenty men. Wilson had emptied his revolver and found no time in which to reload.

He hurled himself upon the first man he saw and the two fell to the floor where they tumbled about like small boys in a street fight. They kicked and squirmed and reached for each other's throats until they rolled into the anteroom where they were left alone to fight it out. Wilson made his feet and the other followed as nimbly as a cat. Then the two faced each other. The humor of the situation steadied Wilson for a moment. Shot after shot was ringing through the old building, men fighting for their lives with modern rifles, and yet here he stood driven back to a savage, elemental contest with bare fists in a room built a century before. It was almost as though he had suddenly been thrust out of the present into the past. But the struggle was none the less serious.

His opponent rushed and Wilson met him with a blow which landed between the eyes. It staggered him. Wilson closed with him, but he felt a pair of strong arms tightening about the small of his back.

In spite of all he could do, he felt himself break. He fell. The fellow had his throat in a second. He twisted and squirmed but to no purpose. He tried a dozen old wrestling tricks, but the fingers only tightened the firmer. Cheek against cheek the two lay and the fingers with fierce zeal sank deeper and deeper into Wilson's throat. He strained his breast in the attempt to catch a single breath. He saw the stuccoed ceiling above him slowly blur and fade. The man's weight pressed with cruel insistence until it seemed as though he were supporting the whole building. He heard his deep gulping breathing, felt his hot breath against his neck.

The situation grew maddening because of his helplessness, then terrifying. Was he going to die here in an anteroom at the hands of this common soldier? Was he going to be strangled like a clerk at the hands of a footpad? Was the end coming here, within perhaps a hundred yards of Jo? He threw every ounce in him into a final effort to throw off this demon. The fellow, with legs wide apart, remained immovable save spasmodically to take a tighter grip.

The sounds were growing far away. Then he heard his name called and knew that Stubbs was looking for him. This gave him a new lease of life. It was almost as good as a long breath. But he could n't answer — could make no sound to indicate where he was. The call came again from almost beside the door. Then he saw Stubbs glance in among

the shadows and move off again. He kicked weakly at the floor. Then he heaved his shoulders with a strength new-born in him, and the fellow's tired fingers weakened, — weakened for so long as he could take one full breath. But before he could utter the shout the merciless fingers had found their grip once more. The man on top of him, now half crazed, snapped at his ear like a dog. Then he pressed one knee into the pit of Wilson's stomach with gruelling pain. He was becoming desperate with the resistance of this thing beneath him.

Once again Stubbs appeared at the door. Wilson raised his leg and brought it down sharply. Stubbs jumped at the sound and looked in more closely. He saw the two forms. Then he bent swiftly and brought the butt of his revolver down sharply on the fellow's temple. What had been a man suddenly became nothing but a limp bundle of bones. Wilson threw him off without the slightest effort. Then he rolled over and devoted himself to the business of drinking in air — great gulps of it, choking over it as a famished man will food.

"Are you hurt anywhere?"

"No."

"Can ye stand up?"

"In a minute."

"Pretty nigh the rocks that time."

"He — had a grip like iron."

"Better keep out in the open sea where ye can be seen."

Wilson struggled up and, except for a biting pain in his throat, soon felt himself again.

"Where 's Danbury?" he asked.

"Dunno. But we can't stop to look for him. That gang has gone wild. Guess we 've pretty nigh cleaned out the place an' now they are runnin' free."

"Won't Otaballo reach here soon?"

"Can't tell. If he does n't he won't find much left but the walls. I 'm goin' arter them an' see what I can do."

"Better keep your eyes open. They 'll shoot you in a minute."

"Mebbe so, mebbe not."

He led the way along an intricate series of corridors to a broad flight of stairs. Above there was a noise like a riot.

"If I can git 'em inter one room — a room with a lock on 't," he growled.

As they hurried along, Wilson caught glimpses of massive furniture, gilded mirrors, costly damask hangings brought over three hundred years before when this was the most extravagant country on the face of the earth. They took the broad stairs two at a time, and had almost reached the top when Wilson stopped as though he had been seized by the shoulder. For, as distinctly as he had heard Stubbs a moment ago, he heard Jo call his name. He listened intently for a repetition. From the rooms beyond he heard the scurrying of heavy feet, hoarse shouting, and the tumble of overturned furniture. That was all. And yet that other call still rang in his ears and echoed

through his brain. Furthermore, it had been distinct enough to give him a sense of direction; it came from below. He hesitated only a second at thought of leaving Stubbs, but this other summons was too imperative to be neglected even for him. He turned and leaped down the stairs to the lower floor.

In some way he must find the prison and in some other way get the keys and go through those cells. If he could find some member of the palace force, this would be simple. He wandered from one room to another but stumbled only over dead men. The wounded had crawled out of sight and the others had fled. A medley of rooms opened from the long halls and Wilson ran from one of these to another. Finally, in one he caught a glimpse of a skulking figure, some underling, who had evidently returned to steal. In a second he was after him. The chase led through a half dozen chambers, but he kept at the fellow's heels like a hound after a fox. He cornered him at the end of a passageway and pinned him against the wall.

In the little Spanish he had picked up Wilson managed to make the fellow understand that he wished to find his way to the prison. But the effect of this was disastrous, for the man crumbled in his hands, sinking weak-kneed to the floor where he began to beg for mercy.

"It 's not for you. I have friends there I wish to free."

"For the love of God, go not near them. It is death down there."

"Up," cried Wilson, snatching him to his feet. "Lead the way or I shoot."

He placed the cold muzzle of his revolver against the nape of the fellow's neck and drew a shriek from him.

"No! No! Do not shoot! But do not go there!"

"Not another word. On, quickly!"

"I do not know where, — I swear I do not know, signor!"

But hearing the sharp click of the weapon as Wilson cocked it, he led the way. They passed the length of several corridors which brought them to an open courtyard on the further side of which lay a low, granite building connected with the palace proper by a series of other small buildings. The fellow pointed to an open door.

"In there, signor. In there."

"Go on, then."

"But the signor is not going to take me in there? I pray, — see, I pray on my knees not."

He slumped again like a whipped dog and Wilson in disgust and not then understanding his fear, kicked him to his feet. The fellow trembled like one with the ague; his cheeks were ashen, his eyes wide and startled. One would have thought he was on his way to his execution. Half pushed by Wilson, he entered the door to what was evidently an outer guardroom, for it contained only a few rough benches, an overturned table which in falling had scattered about a pack of greasy cards and a package of tobacco. Out of this

opened another door set in solid masonry, and this, too, stood ajar as though all the guards had suddenly deserted their posts, as doubtless they had at the first sound of firing. Still forcing his guide ahead, they went through this door into a smaller room and here Wilson made a thorough search for keys, but without result. It was, of course, possible that below he might still find a sentry or turnkey; but even if he did not, he ought at least to be able to determine definitely whether or not she were here. Then he would return with men enough to tear the walls down if necessary.

They passed through an oak and iron door out of this room and down a flight of stone steps which took them into the first of the damp under-passageways leading directly to the dungeons themselves. The air was heavy with moisture and foul odors. It seemed more like a vault for the dead than a house of the living. Wilson had found and lighted a lantern and this threw the feeblest of rays ahead. Before him his prisoner fumbled along close to the wall, glancing back at every step to make sure his captor was at his heels.

So they came to a second corridor running in both directions at right angles from that in which they stood. He remained very still for a moment in the hope that he might once more hear the voice which would give him some hint of which way to turn. But the only sound that greeted him was the scratch of tiny feet as a big rat scurried by. He closed his eyes and concentrated his thought upon her. He had heard that so

people had communicated with one another and he himself had had proof enough, if it were true that she was here. But he found it impossible to concentrate his thoughts in this place, — even to keep his eyes closed.

Then the silence was pierced by a shriek, the sweat-starting, nerve-racked cry of a man in awful pain. It was not an appeal for mercy, or a cry for assistance, but just a naked yell wrung from a throat grown big-veined in the agony of torture. Wilson could think of only one thing, the rats. He had a vision of them springing at some poor devil's throat after he had become too weak to fight them off. The horrible damp air muffled the cry instantly. He heard an oath from his guide and the next second the fellow flew past him like a madman and vanished from sight toward the outer door. For a second Wilson was tempted to follow. The thonght of Jo turned him instantly. He leaped to the left from where the cry had come, holding the lantern above his head. His feet slipped on the slimy ooze covering the clay floors, but by following close to the wall he managed to keep his feet. So he came to an open door. Within, he saw dimly two figures, one apparently bending over the other which lay prostrate. Pushing in, he thrust the lantern closer to them. He had one awful glimpse of a passion-distorted face; it was the Priest! It sent a chill the length of him. He dropped the lantern and shot blindly at the form which hurled itself upon him with the flash of a knife.

Wilson felt a slight sting upon his shoulder; the

Priest's knife had missed him by the thickness of his shirt. He closed upon the skinny form and reached for his throat. The struggle was brief; the other was as a child before his own young strength. The two fell to the floor, but Wilson got to his feet in an instant and picking up the other bodily hurled him against the wall. For a second he tasted revenge, tingled with the satisfaction of returning that blow in the dark. The priest dropped back like a stunned rat.

The light in the overturned lantern was still flickering. Snatching it up he thrust it before the eyes of the man who now lay groaning in the aftermath of the agony to which he had been subjected. The lantern almost dropped from his trembling fingers as he recognized in the face distorted with pain, Don Sorez. In a flash he realized that the Priest had another and stronger reason for joining this expedition than mere revenge for his people; doubtless by a wile of some sort he had caused the arrest of these two, and then had led the attack upon the prison for the sake of getting this man as completely within his power as he had thought him now to be. The torture was for the purpose of forcing the secret of the hiding place of the image. For a second Wilson felt almost pity for the man who lay stretched out before him; he must have suffered terribly. But he wasted little thought upon this; the girl was still to be located. Wilson saw his eyes open. He stooped:

"Can you hear? " he asked. "Is the girl in this place? "

The thin lips moved, but there was no distinct response.

"Make an effort. Tell me, and I will get you out of here too."

The lips fluttered as though Sorez was spurred by this promise to a supreme effort.

"The key — he has it."

"Who?"

Wilson followed the eyes and saw the brass thing lying near the Priest.

He turned again to Sorez —

"Can you tell me anything about where she is? Is she near you?"

"I — don't know."

There was nothing for it but to open each door in order. It was of course likely that the two had been thrust into nearby cells, but had these been filled she might have been carried to the very end of the passageway. He fitted the ponderous brass thing into the first lock. It took a man's strength to turn the rusty and clumsy bolt, but it finally yielded. Again it took a man's strength to throw open the door upon its rusted hinges. A half savage thing staggered to the threshold and faced him with strange jabbering. Its face and hands were cruelly lacerated, its eyes bulging, its tattered remnants of clothes foul. Wilson faced it a second and then stepped back to let it wander aimlessly on down the corridors.

The cold sweat started from his brow. Supposing Jo had gone mad? If the dark, the slime, the rats,

could do this to a man, what would they not do to a woman? He knew her; she would fight bravely and long. There would be no whimpering, no hysterics, but even so there would be a point where her woman's strength would fail. And all the while she might be calling for him and wondering why he did not come. But he *was* coming, — he *was!* He forced the key into the next door and turned another creaking lock. And once again as the door opened he saw that a thing not more than half human lay within. Only this time it crouched in a far corner laughing horribly to itself. It glared at him like some animal. He could n't let such a thing as that out; it would haunt him the rest of his life. It was better that it should laugh on so until it died. He closed the door, throwing against it all his strength with sudden horror. God, he might go mad himself before he found her!

At the end of a dozen cells and a dozen such sights, he worked in a frenzy. The prison now rang to the shrieking and the laughter of those who wandered free, and those who, still half sane, but savage, fought with their fellows, too weak to do harm. The farther he went the more hopeless seemed the task and the more fiercely he worked. He began to sicken from the odors and the dampness. Finally the bit of metal stuck in one of the locks so fast that he could not remove it. He twisted it to the right and to the left until his numbed fingers were upon the point of breaking. In a panic of fear he twisted his handkerchief in the handle and throwing all his weight upon it tried to

force it out. Then he inserted the muzzle of his revolver in the key handle and using this for a lever tried to turn it either way. It was in vain; it held as firmly as though it had been welded into the lock. In a rage he pounded and kicked at the door. Then he checked himself.

If ever he hoped to finish his task, he must work slowly and calmly. With his back to the door, he rested for so long a time as a man might count five hundred. He breathed slowly and deeply with his eyes closed. Then he turned and began slowly to work the key back and forth, in and out. It fell from the lock. He reinserted it and after a few light manipulations, turned it carefully to the right. The bolt snapped back. He opened the door.

Within, all was dark. The cell seemed empty. In fact, he was about to close the door and pass on to the next cell, when he detected a slight movement in the corner. He entered cautiously and threw his light in that direction. Something — a woman — sat bolt upright watching him as one might watch a vision. He moved straight forward and when within two feet paused, his heart leaping to his throat, his hand grown so weak that he dropped the lantern.

"Jo!" he gasped tremblingly, still doubting his own senses.

"David. You — you came!"

He moved forward, arms outstretched, half fearing she would vanish.

CHAPTER XVII

'Twixt Cup and Lip

HE took her in his arms and she lay there very quietly, her head upon his shoulder, in the lethargy of exhaustion. She clasped her hands about his neck as a very tired child would do. The curve of her cheek lay near his lips and, though he yearned to do so, he would not kiss it. He did not speak to her, but was satisfied to hold her there in silence. The feel of her heart beating against his, the warmth of her breath as it brushed his bare throat, the perfume of her hair — those things were enough now. After the last long weeks of doubt, after the last day of gruelling fear, after the terror of the last half hour, such things as these were soul-satisfying. So he allowed himself to stand a few minutes there in this dark cell which to him had become suddenly fairer than any garden. Then he spoke softly to her:

"Come," he said, "we will go out into the sunshine now."

She raised her head, looking at him through half-closed eyes.

"I — I don't want to move, David."

He unclasped the hands from about his neck and, placing an arm about her waist, led her slowly out

into the corridor. She followed his guidance, resting her weight upon him. And he who had come into this foul place in terror and despair walked out in a dizzy bewilderment of joy. As he passed the open door of Sorez' cell he hesitated. The evil prompting of his heart was to pass by this man — so to let him go forever out of his life. He had but to move on. He could find a refuge for the girl where she would be safe from this influence, but this would not be possible if he stopped to take Sorez with them. Once the girl knew the man was alive and in this condition her sympathies would be so aroused that she would never desert him. Wilson knew that he must decide instantly. To leave that prison without him was to leave him to his death. He turned towards the cell door; he had promised.

The man had evidently recovered his strength somewhat, for he sat upon the edge of the wooden bunk staring about him. He was alone in the cell — the Priest was gone! On the whole, Wilson was glad of this. He felt the better for not having the burden of his death, however richly it was deserved, upon his hands. The girl apparently was still in too much of a daze to recognize Sorez. Wilson spoke to him.

"Can you walk?"

"God," he cried. "Who are you? You speak English!"

Wilson repeated his question impatiently.

"If you can walk, follow me and I 'll take you out of this hole."

The man tottered to his feet, groping with his hand along the wall.

"Here," said Wilson, overcoming a shrinking repugnance he now felt for the man, "take my arm."

Sorez grabbed it and with this much help was able to get along. And so, with the girl he loved upon one arm and the man he hated upon the other, Wilson made his way along the slippery subterranean galleries. He was practically carrying them both, but the lightness of the one almost made up for the burden of the other. The only thing for which he prayed was that none of those whimpering things he had loosed from their cells should cross his path. This was granted; for all he saw or heard he might have been treading the catacombs.

When he came again into the sunlight he was blinded for a second, while the other two clapped their hands over their eyes, suffering for quite a few moments intense pain. Except for being a bit pale, the girl did not look badly. Her hair had become loosened and her gown begrimed, but Wilson still saw her as she was that night when she lay curled up asleep in the big chair. As for Sorez, whether it was the pain of the torture or what, his hair, which before was an iron gray, had turned almost white.

The three made their way across the courtyard and again into the palace. He heard noise and confusion on the floors above. The halls were rank with the smell of powder. As they went on they found the floor covered with splinters, and on either side saw the

panels rent and torn as though by a huge iron claw. There was still hoarse shouting and the occasional snap of a pistol above, which showed that Stubbs had not yet succeeded in controlling the men.

He had no idea as to where it was possible to take the girl and Sorez, but he hoped that he might come upon a room in the palace here where it would be safe to leave them until it was possible to get out into the city. Perhaps, too, if he reached the entrance, he might find Stubbs. Sorez was beginning to weigh heavily upon his arm, and he resented having to sacrifice to him any of the strength he needed for the girl. So he staggered on to the very room where a short while before he had fought for his life. But here he was checked by a noise from without — cheering as from the advance of several hundred men. Was it possible that reënforcements had arrived for the government? If so, this meant immediate danger. They would exact vengeance swiftly and surely upon any man known to be associated with the revolution. This would leave the girl in as bad a plight as that from which he had just rescued her. He shook off Sorez and, picking up the girl, started into the small anteroom; but before he was out of sight the first of the soldiers had sprung up the steps. With an oath three of the men seized him and drew him back, the girl still in his arms, to the door. Jo roused herself and struggled to her feet, facing the strange soldiers without a sign of fear. Wilson reached his holster, but the girl checked his hand, realizing, even in her torpid

condition, the uselessness of it. In a minute others flocked up the stairs and around them with noisy demonstration, and soon, following these, the main body of the regiment with a snappy gray-haired officer at their head. The crowd, save for the two guards, gave way from before the trio and left them confronting their leader. By some description of Danbury's or by instinct, Wilson recognized him as none other than Otaballo. This then was the main body of the Revolutionists! Before he had time to speak Wilson saw that his own identity was beginning to dawn on Otaballo. He stepped forward and spoke the single word:

"Americans?"

The effect was magical. The soldiers drew back to respectful attention.

"Americans," answered Wilson.

The general spoke in broken English.

"How came you here?"

"I am with Danbury," answered Wilson. "The girl and the man were in the dungeons below."

"Ah! These are the two captured by the — the late government?"

"Yes. I would like shelter for the girl. She is very weak."

"*Dios!* you shall have refuge at once."

He turned to one of his lieutenants and in Spanish gave his command.

"In the name of the Queen seize the house opposite."

He turned back to Wilson.

"I will leave you five men; is that enough?"

"Thanks."

Otaballo at the head of his men proceeded to sterner business, throwing out guards through the palace and making the victory secure.

Half carrying the girl, Wilson followed the soldiers across the street. Two of them supported Sorez. The house opposite was empty, the occupants having deserted it at the approach of the enemy. It was a rambling, story-and-a-half structure, somewhat elaborately furnished. Wilson placed a guard at the front and rear of the place with orders to admit no one until he had first seen them, and then carried the girl upstairs. She was not asleep, but so nearly numb with the strain that she could neither think nor speak. It seemed to him that there was only one thing to do — let her sleep. Rest at present was more necessary than food. On the second story there was a fine large bedroom, with a big bed covered with snow-white linen. He placed her upon this.

"Sleep as long as you wish," he bade her, though he knew she scarcely heard his voice. "I shall be outside."

Before he closed the door he turned and saw her breathing deeply with closed eyes. It seemed only humane to care for Sorez. On the first floor he found a divan and, with the help of the soldiers, arranged him upon this, where he, too, was soon fast asleep.

Then he returned to the second floor and, lying down before her door, was soon unconscious himself. How long he lay so he could not tell, but he was aroused by

the sound of shouting outside the house. Springing to his feet, he listened at her door; there was no sound. He opened it and looked within; she lay where he had left her, still sleeping. Going to the window he looked out and was surprised to find the street crowded with citizens. It must have been long after noon, as he could tell by the sun. From all appearances this was some sort of a patriotic demonstration before the old palace. He watched it with indifferent interest until a closed carriage drove up. At this moment he saw Stubbs himself step from the palace and at the side of Otaballo approach the carriage. Here was his opportunity to make known his whereabouts to his partner. He tiptoed to the stairs and descended to the first floor. He warned the guard at the exit once more to admit no one and hurried out to push his way to Stubbs' side. The crowd recognized him as an American from his dress and opened up a path for him. But even so he would not have reached his goal had not Stubbs seen him and, with a glad shout of welcome neglected his diplomatic duties to grasp the hand of the man he thought dead. At this moment the princess herself stepped from the vehicle and, ignoring the applause of the multitude, turned her attention to Wilson. She hesitated a moment, and then addressed him, speaking faultless English:

"Pardon me, but are not you one — one of Mr. Danbury's friends?"

"We both are," answered Wilson.

"Your name is ——"

"Wilson."

"Ah, how fortunate! It is you of all men I wished most to see. If——" A shout from a thousand throats rent the air. She looked dazed.

"If your Highness would bow," suggested Otaballo.

She turned to the gathering, smiled, and bowed. But her scant courtesy was scarcely finished before her eyes were again upon Wilson and the anxious look uppermost in them.

"I must see you," she commanded. "Follow me into the palace."

She raised the hem of her light dress and tripped up the stairs looking more like a schoolgirl than a queen. Wilson and Stubbs followed after Otaballo, who appeared somewhat worried. They entered the palace, and at her request a guard led them into the privacy of a small room — as it happened, the room which Wilson had twice before visited that day.

"I asked you to come," she began a bit nervously, "because you seemed to be the friend of whom Dicky talked to the last——"

"The last!" exclaimed Wilson.

"Oh, not that," she assured him, grasping his fear. "He is n't — is n't dead. But you knew he was wounded?"

"No," he answered quickly, "I had not heard."

"Before the palace here and — he was brought to me. His wound is n't so very serious, the doctor says, — it 's in his leg and he won't be able to walk for some time."

"I am sorry for him," said Wilson, sincerely. "If there is anything I can do ——"

"There is! There is! I have had him carried to his boat. He was unconscious and the doctor gave him something to make him sleep."

"Drugged him?" he demanded roughly.

"Only so that he would go quietly. Then I gave the sailors orders to sail back home with him."

"But why did you wish him to go back?"

"I must tell you, and you will understand. Oh, please to understand! He wanted to — to stay and — and I wanted him to stay. I think if — if it had n't been for this trouble we — we would have been married. But now ——"

"Your station forbids it," he finished for her with a note of harshness in his voice.

She answered very quietly — so quietly that it chided him.

"No, it is not that. He does n't need any title men might give him. I would have him King — but my people would only kill him. That is the reason."

"Pardon me," begged Wilson. "I — I did not understand."

"They are very jealous — my people. He would have many enemies here — enemies who would n't fight fair."

"And he made you Queen for this!" gasped Wilson.

"He did n't know — did he?"

"I should say not."

"Now I want you to talk to him if he returns, and

tell him he must n't come back and get killed. Won't you?"

"I will talk to him if I see him, but — he will come back just the same."

"He must n't. You don't understand fully the danger."

"You could n't make *him* understand."

"Oh!" she cried.

She put her clasped hands to her hot cheeks a moment.

"If we could keep him away for a month — just a month. Then perhaps I could let someone else — be — be here."

"You mean to abdicate?"

"Yes, could n't I? The General told me that if I did n't send him away at once you would all be killed; but perhaps later — when things have quieted——"

"There will always be," he warned, "a republic in the heart of your kingdom. The quieter — the more danger."

General Otaballo had remained in the rear of the room doing his best to control his impatience, but now he ventured to step forward. He saluted.

"Pardon me, your Highness, but they wait to make you their Queen."

"Don't! Don't!" she pleaded. "Leave me for to-day just a maid of Carlina. To-morrow——"

"Your Majesty," answered the General, with some severity, "to-morrow may be too late for all of us."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"That the situation now is a great deal more serious than your Majesty seems to understand. We are victorious, yes. But it is as difficult to maintain a victory as to win one. To-day the crowd throw up their caps for Beatrice, but if Beatrice spurns them and ignores their loyal cheers, it takes but a trifle to turn their thoughts the other way. Let me escort your Majesty through the city; let me establish you in the palace which has been graced by so many of your kin; let them see you where their grandfathers saw your brave aunt, and the last drop of blood in their veins is yours."

She pouted like a child, her thoughts still upon other things than crowns of human make.

"But I don't want their blood. I don't want to be Queen. I want to be left alone."

She looked out the window to the blue sky so full of gold and peace, where the birds tumbled at will, their throats bursting with song.

"General," she said, "leave me to-day, at any rate. That is all I ask, — just to-day."

"Your Majesty," he answered slowly, "it is not mine to grant, not yours to take. Many things may happen in a night, — too many. There will be much talking in the cafés this evening, many gatherings of men, much afoot before dawn. The forces brought in by General Danbury already belong to anyone who will pay them. It is not his fault, — they fought well for their money; but now they are equally ready to fight again for someone else. You alone can hold

them to your cause. President Arlano escaped us and is doubtless busy. If we gain the crowd, we are safe against anything he may do; without the crowd, we are in jeopardy. Once the people see you crowned — once they can shout for Beatrice with her before their eyes, a living thing to fight for — they are ours forever."

"But ——"

"Your Majesty has not fully considered the alternative; it is that you and I and all the brave men who fought to-day for you will be at the mercy of Arlano, — at the mercy of the man whose father slew your aunt, — at the mercy of the man who tortured to death Banaca. It is a bloody mercy we would get. Beside your own, a thousand lives depend upon what you do before night."

The girl drew back from him in fright. With the memory of her quiet yesterday in the sun; the drowsy yesterdays which preceded it; with the picture of this very man who in the past had never stood to her for anything but a pleasant companion at tea, the present situation seemed absurd and unreal. What was she that her insignificant actions should be of such moment? She had but one object in mind: to place Danbury without the power of all this strife, and she was even balked in that. For the first time she realized fully what a serious crisis he had precipitated. But it was too late for her to check its results. If she went now with General Otaballo, it would leave no possible outlet for her to avoid assuming the title of Queen;

she must mount the throne at once. To do this meant to give up the greatest thing in her life. There was no possible escape from it. Only by renouncing Danbury utterly, by keeping him from Carlina, could she save his life. The only alternative was to fly, but this meant the sacrifice of too many other lives dear to her. The loyal, aged man before her who had thrown the remnant of his years into the cause was in itself enough to banish such a thought from her mind.

And this was what Dick had come across the seas to accomplish. It was a cruel jest of Fate. In his desire to secure for her all that he in his big heart thought she deserved, he had cheated her of the very thing her soul most craved. Yes, it was cruel, cruel. It would have been easier if he had not told her of his love, if he at least had left it a thing merely to be guessed at, a pleasant dream which she could have kept always as a sort of fairy possibility.

Her cheeks lost their color as she faced the man who watched her with fatherly solicitude. He stood waiting like some Nemesis, — waiting with the assurance that she would act as all the royal women of her race had always acted, bravely and loyally. From without there came a fresh cheer from the impatient men who waited for her.

"You hear?" he asked gently.

Her lips scarcely moved.

"Yes, I hear."

For a moment she smothered her face in her hands. This meant so much to her. It was not a matter of a

day, a week, a year; it was for a whole weary, lonesome lifetime. Then she faced him.

"I will come," she said.

He raised her fingers to his lips.

"Your Majesty has the blood of her race."

She turned a white face to Wilson.

"That 's it," she said. "They call me Queen, but you see how helpless I am. You must tell him this and you must not let him come back."

Otaballo held the door wide for her and she passed out. From the bottom of his heart Wilson pitied her, but this very pity brought to his mind that other woman whom he himself had left behind. He hurried out of the building after telling Stubbs where he could be found, and across the street. He took the stairs joyously, three at a time. The door of the room where he had left her stood open. The bed within was empty.

CHAPTER XVIII

Blind Alleys

FOR a moment he stood there staring, wondering if it could be only a dream that he had held her in his arms, that he had brought her up here, that she had lain upon this white bed which now mocked him with its emptiness. Then he took a step into the room, where he saw still the imprint of her head upon the pillow. He turned at this and ran into the hall, shouting her name. He was down the stairs in three bounds. The couch where he had left Sorez was also empty. The guard at the front door would not believe when told; but the proof lay in the absence of the guard in the rear. This door opened upon a small garden surrounded by a low wall. A gate led from this into a narrow street in the rear. If they were gone far they must have left in a carriage, for neither of them was strong enough to walk.

With a feeling of more bitter hatred than he had ever felt against any man, he realized that Sorez must have been in part shamming. That he was weak and exhausted there could be no doubt; but it was equally clear now that he was by no means so weak as he had led Wilson to believe. Not even Stubbs could have

drawn Wilson from the house, had he suspected Sorez of being able to move from that couch within twelve hours.

Wilson blamed himself for stupidity, for carelessness, for almost criminal negligence in thus leaving the girl. And yet one might as soon reckon on the dead coming to life, as for this dénouement. It was clear that he was dealing with no ordinary man, but he should have known this after the display of nerve he had witnessed as Sorez had climbed the stairs in his own house. He was a man with an iron will, with the ability to focus whatever energy remained within him upon a single objective. Through this Wilson gained a ray of hope; even if he found it impossible to locate him before, he knew that Sorez would press on to the lake of Guadiva. No power, no force less than death would serve to prevent him. Sooner or later Wilson would meet his man there. The present pity of it was that with the information he possessed, the secret of the parchment, he might possibly have prevented this journey and saved the girl much hardship.

So his brain reasoned, but back of this was the throbbing ache that would not listen to reason. He wanted her again within his arms; he wanted again to look into her dark eyes, to feel again the warmth of her breath against his neck. He wanted, too, the sense of protecting and caring for her. He had meant to do so much; to find a comfortable lodging place for her until he could take her back; to forage food and clothing for her. A hundred things unsaid whirled

about in his brain; a hundred plans unfulfilled mocked him; a hundred needs unsatisfied. For a few precious moments he had held her in his arms, — a few moments when he craved years, and then he had lost her. Perhaps there was still a chance. His own head was too confused to form a plan at present. He determined to return to the palace and seek Stubbs.

With the aid of two of Otaballo's lieutenants he was able to locate Stubbs, who was assisting the General in an attempt to bring the mercenaries into some sort of order. These men finally worn out, he had succeeded in enticing into one of the big rooms where he had calmly turned the lock upon them. Wilson greeted Stubbs with the single exclamation:

"They 've gone again."

"What — the girl?"

"Gone," groaned Wilson. "But within the hour. I want you to help me find them."

"Like huntin' fer a loose dory in th' dark, ain't it?"

"Yes, but you 'd hunt even for your dory, would n't you?"

"Right, m' boy, an' I ain't suggestin' thet yer change yer course, only — these seas are uncharted fer me. But how 'd she git outern yer hands once yer had her?"

"Oh, I was a fool, Stubbs. I thought she would sleep until night, and so came over here to let you know where I was. That would have been all right if I had n't stayed, but the Queen came and — she told you about Danbury?"

"Yes," nodded Stubbs, "an' I can't figger out whether it 's right er wrong. At any rate, he 's taken care of fer a couple weeks. I found out she told the truth, and that the boat has gone. But about the girl — have you an idea where this pirate has taken her?"

"No more than you have."

"He is n't a stranger here, is he? Prob'ly has friends, eh?"

"That 's so. I know he has. I saw some of his letters."

"Know who they are?"

Wilson shook his head.

"I suppose we might find that out from the General — he must know him, for the man was a surgeon or something in the armies here."

Two hours passed before they were able to reach the General, and then they had but a word with him. The girl had done his bidding and was now crowned Queen of Carlina. Every loyal citizen of Bogova was out, anxious to cheer himself hoarse before his neighbor. From the outlying districts the natives were pouring into the city as fast as they heard of the termination of hostilities. Otaballo had his hands full with prospect of more to do every hour.

"Everyone in Bogova knows Sorez," he answered. "If he had been in the city for the last year I should know more of his possible whereabouts than I do. He was a surgeon in the Republican armies here, but he took no active interest in the Republic. How little his arrest proves. In fact, I think he stands in dis-

favor, owing to the trouble with the hill men, which they think started with him. I 've even heard him accused of having stolen the image. But I don't believe that or I 'd arrest him myself. As it is, I 'd like to have a talk with him. I can't suggest where he is, but I 'll give you a couple of men who know him and know the city to help you."

"Good!" exclaimed Wilson.

"In the meanwhile," he said, turning to Stubbs, "I 'm depending on you to keep those men in order. If they only had their pay ——"

"They 'll get it as soon as we can reach Danbury. It was you who sent him away, General."

There was a note of resentment in Stubbs' voice. He had not at all approved of this act.

"I know, I know. But — I saved his life by it. As soon as things settle down a bit it will be safer for him. In the meanwhile, if we could get those men out of the city. To be frank, I 'm afraid of them. Arlano might reach them and he could buy them with a few pieces of gold."

"I 'm not denying that," said Stubbs, "unless ye can give them *more* gold. As fer myself, I can't promise ye nothin'. I 've finished my cruise with the captain an' done my best. If he was here, I 'd stick by him still, but he ain't, an' I 've gut other things in hand. Every mother's son of the crew will git their pay fer their work so far, but further, I dunno. They done what they promised — took the city fer ye. Now if ye does n't watch 'em I reckon they 'll take it fer

themselves. As much as they can git in their pockets, anyhow."

"I don't like that," answered the General, darkly. "If you 'll look after them ——"

"I wash my hands of them from now on," broke in Stubbs. "Havin' other duties."

"Other duties here?" asked Otaballo, instantly suspicious.

"The findin' of this gent Sorez bein' one of 'em," answered Stubbs. "An' I guess we better be about it."

"It is for the sake of the girl," explained Wilson. "The one you saw me bringing from the dungeon. Sorez kidnapped her from America, and now he has taken her again."

The General's face brightened.

"Ah, that is it!"

He summoned a lieutenant and held a brief whispered conversation with him.

"Gentlemen," he concluded, turning to Wilson, "Lieutenant Ordaz — he will give you what assistance you need."

"An' th' same," said Stubbs, in a whisper to Wilson as soon as they were upon the street again, "we 'll proceed to lose. I did n't like th' look in Oteerballo's eye when he give us this 'ere travellin' mate."

It was an easy enough task for Stubbs. At the end of three or four blocks he instructed Wilson to detach himself and go back to the last public house they had passed and there wait for him. This Wilson did, and in less than ten minutes Stubbs appeared alone.

"Sorry ter part comp'ny with the gent, but with him we wuz more likely ter find Oteerballo than Sorez. 'Nother thing, we has gotter do some plannin' 'fore we begins work. 'Cause if I ain't mistaken, we has a long chase ahead. In th' fust place, how much gold is yer carryin'?"

"Gold? Not a dollar."

"I thought 'bout thet amount. Next place, is yer papers safe?"

Wilson felt of his pocket where they were, tightly pinned in.

"Could n't lose those without losing my coat."

"Might lose yer coat in this here city. Next, how 'bout weapins?"

Wilson drew out the revolver which he had managed to keep through all the confusion. In addition to that he had some fifty cartridges loose in his pocket.

"Good!" commented Stubbs. Then he took an inventory of his own resources.

"In th' fust place, I has some three hundred dollars in gold in this here leather belt 'bout my waist. Never had less in it since a 'sperience I had forty year ago. Fer weapins we is 'bout equal. Now I figgers this way; it will take us 'bout a week to learn what we has gotter learn 'bout the coast beyond those hills afore we takes chances on crossin' 'em. We can git this information at th' same time we is doin' what we can to locate th' girl, though I ain't reckonin' on seein' her till we reaches th' lake. We can pick up our outfit and our grub at th' same time."

Wilson broke in.

"I don't like the scheme, Stubbs. I want to get to work and find the girl before she gets over the hills. It 's too hard a trip for her — it might kill her. She 's weak now, but that brute would n't care. If ——"

"Slow! Slow, m' son. Yer blood is hot, but sometimes th' short course is th' longest. If we wastes a week doin' nothin' but thet, we wastes another perhaps arter we had found they has started. If we makes ourselves sure of our course to th' treasure, we makes sure of our course to th' girl. Thet is th' only *sure* thing, an' when ye 've gut big things at stake it 's better ter be sure than quick."

"I suppose you are right."

"'Nother thing, m' son, 'cordin' to my notions this ain't goin' ter be a partic'laly healthy place fer 'Mericans in a day er two. Now thet they have bamboozled the Queen (an' she herself is as squar' a little woman as ever lived) inter gittin' Danbury outer th' city, an' now thet the fight is won fer 'em, an' now thet th' boys we brought is about ter raise hell (as they certainly is), Otaballo ain't goneter be squeamish 'bout removin' quiet like and safe everyone who bothers him. In three days we might not be able to git out long 'nuff to git tergether an outfit er ask any questions. There 's a whole lot 'bout thet map o' yourn thet we wanter understan' afore we starts, as I looks at it."

"There is some sense in that."

"It 's a simple proposition; does ye want ter gamble on losin' both chances fer th' sake of savin' a week, or does yer wanter make sure of one fer the double treasure — gold and girl?"

"I 'd give every penny of the treasure to get the girl in my grip once again."

"Ye 've gotter git yer treasure fust afore ye can even do thet."

"I know it. I 'm powerless as things are. If there is a treasure there and we can get it, we 'll have something to work with. If I had the money now, I 'd have fifty men on his track, and I 'd post a hundred along the trail to the lake to intercept him."

"If ye 'd had the treasure, likely 'nuff ye would n't have started. But ye ain't gut it an' ye is a long, long way from gettin' it. But if ye don't divide yer intrests, we is goin' ter git it, an' arter that we is goin' ter git th' girl, if she 's anywhere atop th' earth."

"I believe you, Stubbs," answered Wilson, with renewed enthusiasm. "And I believe that with you we can do it. We 'll make a bargain now; share and share alike every cent we find. Give me your hand on it."

Stubbs reached his big hand across the table and the two men shook.

"Now," he said, "we 'll have a bite to eat and a mouthful to drink and begin work."

During the next week they followed one faint clue after another, but none of them led to anything. Wilson managed to secure the names of many men

who knew Sorez well and succeeded in finding some of them; but to no purpose. He visited every hotel and tavern in the city, all the railroad and steamship offices, but received not a word of information that was of any service. The two had disappeared as effectually as though they had dropped from the earth.

At the advice of Stubbs he kept out of sight as much as possible. The two had found a decent place to board and met here each night, again separating in the morning, each to pursue his own errands.

Both men heard plenty of fresh stories concerning the treasure in the mountains. Rumors of this hidden gold had reached the grandfathers of the present generation and had since been handed down as fact. The story had been strongly enough believed to inspire several expeditions among the natives themselves within the last twenty years, and also among foreigners who traded here. But the information upon which they proceeded had always been of the vaguest so that it had come to be looked upon as a fool's quest.

The three hundred dollars was sufficient with careful buying to secure what the two men needed. Stubbs attended to all these details. They wished to make themselves as nearly as possible independent of the country, so that they could take any route which seemed to be advisable without the necessity of keeping near a base of supplies. So they purchased a large quantity of tinned goods; beef, condensed milk, and soup. Sugar, coffee, chocolate, flour, and salt

made up the burden of the remainder. They also took a supply of coca leaves, which is a native stimulant enabling one to withstand the strain of incredible hardships.

Each of them secured a good Winchester. They were able to procure what ammunition they needed. A good hunting knife completed the armament of each.

For clothing they wore on their feet stout mountain shoes and carried a lighter pair in their kits. They had khaki suits and flannel shirts, with wide Panama sombreros. At the last moment Stubbs thought to add two picks, a shovel, and a hundred feet or more of stout rope. Wilson had made a copy of the map with the directions, and each man wore it attached to a stout cord about his neck and beneath his clothing.

It was in the early morning of August 21 that the two finally left Bogova, with a train of six burros loaded with provisions and supplies for a three months' camping trip, and a native guide.

XIX

The Spider and the Fly

THE sun came warmly out of a clear sky as they filed out of the sleeping town. To the natives and the guide they passed readily enough as American prospectors and so excited no great amount of interest. The first stage of their journey was as pleasant as a holiday excursion. Their course lay through the wooded foothills which lie between the shore and the barren desert. The Cordilleras majestic, white capped, impressive, are, nevertheless, veritable hogs. They drink up all the moisture and corral all the winds from this small strip which lies at their feet. Scarcely once in a year do they spare a drop of rain for these lower planes. And so within sight of their white summits lies this stretch of utter desolation.

It was not until the end of the first day's journey that they reached this barren waste. To the Spanish looters this strip of burning white, so oddly located, must have seemed a barrier placed by Nature to protect her stores of gold beyond. But it doubtless only spurred them on. They passed this dead level in a day and a half of suffocating plodding, and so reached the second lap of their journey.

The trail lies broad and smooth along the lower ranges, for, even neglected as it has been for centuries, it still stands a tribute to the marvelous skill of those early engineers. The two men trudged on side by side climbing ever higher in a clean, bracing atmosphere. It would have been plodding work to any who had lesser things at stake, but as it was the days passed almost as in a dream. With each step, Wilson felt his feet growing lighter. There was a firmness about his mouth and a gladness in his eyes which had not been there until now.

On the third day they reached the highest point of the trail and started down. Both men had felt the effects of the thin air during the last twelve hours and so the descent came as a welcome relief. They camped that night among trees and in an atmosphere that relieved their tired lungs. They also built the first fire they had lighted since the start and enjoyed a hot meal of coffee and toasted porkscraps. They found the steep downward trail to be about as difficult as the upward one, as they were forced to brace themselves at every step. By night they had come to the wooded slopes of the table-lands below, supported by the mighty buttresses of the Andes. It was a fair land in which they found themselves — a land which, save for the vista of snow-capped summits and the lesser volcanic peaks, might have passed for a fertile Northern scene. It was at about sunset that they stopped and Gaspar, the guide, pointed to a spindle lava top against the sky.

"Up there," he informed them, "is the lake of Guadiva. Some say it is there that the great treasure lies."

"So? What treasure?" asked Stubbs, innocently.

"The treasure of the Gilded God which these people worship."

Stubbs listened once again to the story which he had already heard a dozen times. But it came with fresh interest when told within sight of its setting. Then he stared at it until the dark blotted it out. And after that he lighted his pipe and stared at where he had last seen it. Below them a few fires burned in the darkness showing through the windows of the adobe huts.

The next morning they dismissed their guide, as it would be impossible to use him further without revealing the object of their journey. Both Stubbs and Wilson were anxious to push forward to the lake without delay and resolved to reach if possible their goal by night. They figured that as the crow flies it could not be more than twenty-five miles distant. The trail was direct and well enough marked and finally brought them to the village of Soma which is within eight miles of the base of the cone. Here, for the first time since they started, they had a glimpse of the natives. As they entered the small village of adobe huts they were surrounded by a group of the beardless brown men. In a few minutes their number had increased till they formed a complete circle some ten men deep. They did not seem unfriendly, but as they stood there

chattering among themselves they made no motion to open a path for the travelers. They were ordinarily a peaceful people — these of the valley of the Jaula — and certainly in appearance looked harmless enough. Yet there was no doubt but what now they had deliberately blocked the path of these two.

Wilson looked to Stubbs.

"What does this mean?"

"Looks as though we had been brought to anchor. D' ye know 'nuff Spanish to say 'Howdy' to 'em?"

"Perhaps a few presents would talk better?"

"Too many of 'em. Try your parley-vous."

"Might move ahead a bit first and see what happens."

"Then get a grip on your gun, m' boy."

"No," objected Wilson, sharply. "You 'd have a fight in a minute. Move ahead as though we did not suspect we were checked."

He flicked the haunches of the leading burro and the patient animal started automatically. But soon his nose reached the breast of an impassive brown man. Wilson stepped forward.

"Greeting," he said in Spanish.

He received no response.

"Greetings to the chief. Gifts for the chief," he persisted.

The eyes of the little man in front of him blinked back with no inkling of what lay behind them. It was clear that this was a preconceived, concerted

movement. It looked more serious. But Stubbs called cheerily to him:

"See here, m' boy, there 's one thing we can do; wait for *them* to make a move. Sit down an' make yerself comfortable an' see what happens."

They gathered the six burros into a circle, tied them with their heads together and then squatted back to back upon the ground beside them. Stubbs drew out his pipe, filled, and lighted it.

"Keep yer gun within reach," he warned in an undertone to Wilson. "Maybe they don't mean no harm; maybe they does. We 'll make 'em pay heavy fer what they gits from us, anyhow."

The surrounding group watched them with silent interest, but at the end of a half hour during which nothing happened more exciting than the relighting of Stubbs' pipe, they appeared uneasy. They found the strangers as stoical as the burros. Many of the men lounged off, but their places were promptly filled by the women and children so that the circle remained intact. Wilson grew impatient.

"It would be interesting to know whether or not we are prisoners," he growled.

"When yer feel like beginnin' the row we can find out that."

"I should feel as though shooting at children to fire into this crowd."

"Thet 's what they be — jus' so many naked kids; but Lord, they can swing knives like men if they 're like sim'lar children I 've seen."

"We 're losing valuable time. We might make another move and try to shoulder our way through until the knives appear and then ——"

He was interrupted by a movement in the crowd. The men fell back to make a path for a tall, lank figure who stepped forward with some show of dignity. Both Wilson and Stubbs exclaimed with one breath:

"The Priest!"

To Wilson he was the man who had tried to kill him in the dark, the man again whom he in his turn had tried to kill. He reached for his holster, but he saw that even now the man did not recognize him. The priest, however, had detected the movement.

"There are too many of us," he smiled, raising a warning finger. "But no harm is meant."

Save for the second or two he had seen him during the fight, this was the first time Wilson had ever had an opportunity to study the man closely. He was puzzled at first by some look in the man's face which haunted him as though it bore some resemblance to another face. It did not seem to be any one feature, — he had never before seen in anyone such eyes; piercing, troubled dark eyes, moving as though never at ease; he had never seen in anyone such thin, tight lips drawn over the teeth as in a man with pain. The nose was normal enough and the cheek-bones high, but the whole expression of the face was one of anxious intensity, of fanatical ardor, with, shadowing it all, an air of puzzled uncertainty. Everything about the man was more or less of a jumbled paradox; he was dressed like a

priest, but he looked like a man of the world; he was clearly a native in thought and action, but he looked more like an American. He stared at Stubbs as though bewildered and unable to place him. Then his face cleared.

"Where is your master?" he demanded.

"The cap'n?" growled Stubbs, anything but pleased at the form and manner of the question. "I 'm not his keeper and no man is my master."

"Does he live?"

Briefly Wilson told of what had been done with Danbury. The Priest listened with interest. Then he asked:

"And your mission here?"

Before Wilson could frame a reply, the Priest waved his hand impatiently to the crowd which melted away.

"Come with me," he said. "I am weary and need to rest a little."

The Priest preceded them through the village and to an adobe hut which stood at a little distance from the other houses and was further distinguished by being surrounded by green things. It was a story-and-a-half-high structure, thatched with straw.

On the way Wilson managed to whisper to Stubbs:

"Let me do the talking."

The latter nodded surlily.

Before entering the hut the Priest gave an order to two of his followers to look after the animals. He caught a suspicious glance from Stubbs as the native led them away.

"The brutes look thirsty and I told the boy to give

them food and drink. The Sun God loves all dumb things."

The room in which they found themselves contained no furniture other than a table, a few chairs, and against one wall a bunk covered with a coarse blanket. The floor was of hard clay and uncovered. From one side of the room there led out a sort of anteroom, and from here he brought out a bottle of wine with three wooden goblets.

The afternoon sun streamed in at the open windows, throwing a golden alley of light across the table; the birds sang without and the heavy green leaves brushed whisperingly against the outer walls. It was a picture of summer peace and simplicity. But within this setting, Wilson knew there lurked a spirit that was but the smile which mocks from a death's head. There was less to be feared from that circle of childlike eyes with which they had been surrounded outside, burning with however much antagonism, than from this single pair of sparkling beads before them, which expressed all the intelligence of a trained intellect strangely mixed with savage impulses and superstition. The Priest poured each of them a cup of sparkling wine and raised his goblet to his lips.

"If my children," he said, almost as though in apology, "do not like strangers, it is after all the fault of strangers of the past. Some of them have respected but little the gods of my people. You are, I presume, prospecting?"

"After a fashion," answered Wilson. "But we prospect as much for friends as gold."

"That is better. You people are strange in your lust for gold. It leads you to do — things which were better not done."

"It is our chief weapon in our world," answered Wilson. "You here have other weapons."

"With but little need of them among ourselves," he answered slowly.

"But you go a long way to protect your gold," retorted Wilson.

"Not for the sake of the gold itself. Our mountains guard two treasures; one is for whoever will, the other is for those not of this world."

"We go for a treasure very much of this world," answered Wilson, with a smile; "in fact, for a woman. She has ventured in here with one Sorez."

Not a line of his lean face altered. He looked back at Wilson with friendly interest — with no suspicion of the important part he had already played in his life.

"This — this man searches for gold?" he asked.

"Yes — for the great treasure of which so many speak."

There was the very slightest tightening of the lips, the merest trace of a frown between the brows.

"He is unwise; the treasure of the Gilded God is well guarded. Yes, even from him."

A big purple butterfly circled through the sunshine and fluttered a moment above the spilled wine upon the table; then it vanished into the dark. The Priest watched it and then glanced up.

"The maid — what part does she play?"

"She is under some strange spell the man has cast over her, I think, for she has been led to believe the wildest sort of a yarn — a tale that her father, long missing, is somewhere about these mountains."

"Her father — missing?" repeated the Priest, his face clouding uneasily.

"The girl loved him as a comrade as well as a father. The two were alone and very much together. He was a captain, and some fifteen years ago disappeared. It was thought that he sailed for some port along the western coast, but he never came back. In time the report came that he was dead, though this was never proven."

The Priest rubbed a brown skinny hand over his eyes.

"But the maid did not believe the rumor?" he asked.

"No — she did not believe."

Wilson did not dare tell him of the crystal gazing for fear that the Priest might jump to the conclusion that it was this power Sorez was using and so would associate the girl too closely with the treasure hunt. Yet he wished to tell him enough to protect the girl from any scheme of vengeance this man might be planning against Sorez himself.

"She is very immature," explained Wilson, "and so believed the older man easily."

"And you?"

"We have come in search of her — to take her back."

"But does she wish to return?"

"If I can make her see ——"

"It is difficult to make a woman see sometimes. It is possible that she was led to come to Bogova in search of her father — but that would not bring her over the mountains. There are other things — like all women she is fond of gold and jewels?"

"That may be," answered Wilson, with heat. "But if you knew her, you would understand that no such motive would lead her to venture so much and endure so much. Nothing could blind her eyes to common sense but such a motive as this which drove her on."

The Priest smiled; he detected the underlying incentive in Wilson's own hazard, but there was still Stubbs and his relation to Danbury. He suspected treachery of some sort.

Wilson grew impatient.

"Night is coming on and we ought to be on our way. I suppose you are in authority over these people. Without your consent we cannot proceed."

"No — but it is far from my intention to interfere with so worthy a mission as yours. I might even assist you. I am always glad to do anything that will help strangers to leave. Sometimes this is done in one way and — sometimes in another. I expected this Sorez to leave by to-morrow."

"To-morrow? Why, he can't have more than reached the lake."

"No, but strangers do not remain long by the lake."

For the last few moments the Priest had seemed

more normal, but now the uncanny, fanatical look returned to his eyes. Stubbs nudged Wilson to rise.

The three moved towards the door.

"I shall not interfere with you — at present," said the Priest. "But — a word of advice — work quickly. As far as the girl is concerned I think she will be ready to return by to-morrow."

"You have seen her?"

"Not myself, but I have a thousand eyes seeing for me in these mountains. They have seen the girl and they tell me she is well, — so much for your comfort."

But there was a smile still about the corners of the mouth which Wilson did not like.

The Priest shifted his eyes to the caravan itself. He made a note of the picks and shovels.

"You have the implements," he remarked, "for grave digging. I trust you will not need to use them. *Adios,* my friends."

He watched them until they disappeared into the woods with a sinister, self-confident smile like a spider watching a fly take the path into his web; a smile that gave him an expression strangely like that of the image itself. Before he turned into the hut again he gave several orders. Three of the brown men melted into the shadows after the caravan.

CHAPTER XX

In the Footsteps of Quesada

ONCE out of hearing, Stubbs, who had not spoken a word, broke out.

"If there ever was a devil treading the earth, it's that man. I've tol' Danbury so from the first. Ye can't trust that sort. My fingers jus' itched along the butt of my weapin' all the while ye was talkin'. Seems though a man oughter have a right to plug sech as him an' be done with it."

"You're prejudiced, Stubbs. I'll admit the man is queer, but, after all, he is protecting his own beliefs and his own people. I don't know as I would trust him any furthr than you, but — he is something of a pathetic figure, too, Stubbs."

"Huh?"

"Looks to me almost like an exile. I've got more to hate him for than you have, but I don't very long at a time."

"Ye've got more t' like him for, too; he's doin' his best to git rid of Sorez fer you. But I says, 'Watch him. Watch him day an' night — mos' particlarly at night.'"

"But what did he mean by to-morrow? I don't know but what we ought to let the treasure go and find Sorez first."

"Find Sorez and ye has ter help him; help him and the Priest fixes us immejiate. Then where 's yer girl? No, th' thing for us ter do is ter git th' treasure first and get it quick. Then we has somethin' ter work with."

"And if the treasure is n't there?"

"Get the girl an' make a run for home. The Priest won't touch her so long as he thinks she is jus' bein' fooled. If we joins th' band, he won't think so an' will kill us all."

"I don't know but what you 're right," answered Wilson.

They pushed their tired animals on to the foot of the mountain and, pausing here just long enough to catch their breath, began the long ascent. It was no child's play from the first. The path was narrow, rocky, and steep, blocked by undergrowth and huge boulders, many of which at a touch became loosened and plunged with a crashing roar down the slope behind them. With any lesser incentive than that which drove them on, they would have stopped a dozen times.

Ahead of them loomed the broken crater edge with just below it a fringe of stubby trees which broke off abruptly where the barren lava began. The cone was like a huge sugar loaf with the upper third cut off unevenly. The edges were sharp and made a wild

jumble of crags which were broken by many deep fissures. Here and there the mountain was split into a yawning chasm. But the growth extended to within about an eighth of a mile of the top. Here it stopped and the path became nothing but a dizzy climb up a slope as steep and smooth as a house roof.

They tethered their animals on the edge of the green growth and here Stubbs set about making a camping place for the night.

"I don't want the dark comin' down on me," he growled as Wilson suggested leaving their things and pushing on to the top, "not until I finds a solid place fer my back where nothin' can come up behin'. You go on if ye wants to, an' I 'll git things settled."

Wilson hesitated, but in the end he was drawn on. She lay beyond, somewhere upon the shores of the lake. It was a scramble almost upon hands and knees. It looked as though it were an impossibility for men heavily laden ever to make their way to the top. He turned once to look back, and saw behind him the green sweep of the beautiful valley of Jaula — then mile upon mile of heavy timber which extended to where the lusty mountains began once more. He attacked the trail anew and at the end of twenty minutes reached the top, bruised, cut, and exhausted. He looked down within the cone — not upon death and desolation, not upon ashes and tumbled rock, but upon the blue waters of the lake of Guadiva. It lay nestled within the bosom of this cone at a depth of just where, on the outside, the green began. The

sun had set early upon it and it now lay a grayish-blue surface surrounded by a luxuriant tangle of growing things. In a circle about it stood the dark buttress of the lava sides. It was like a torquoise set in stone. The contrast to its surroundings was as startling as a living eye of faultless blue in a grinning skull.

He did not have long to look at it — not long to search its borders for some sign of the living. The dark came swiftly. As he was about to turn back, he thought he caught a glimpse of a spiral of smoke upon the farther side, but as he stared at this, it faded until he was not sure it had been at all. He took it for a good-night message from her. Then gold and jewels, though they might be within arm's reach, became as nothing before the deep desire which almost dragged his heart from his body — which almost sent him scrambling down the steep sides within the cone to make a wild dash to reach her side that night.

When he returned, he found Stubbs anxiously waiting for him with supper ready and a shelter for the night picked out beneath two large rocks which effectively guarded their rear.

The next morning, as soon as the sun tipped with pink the snow-capped tops of the Andes, Stubbs was up and studying the map again. The air during the night had been sharp, but snugly wrapped in their blankets both men had secured a sound sleep. Towards the early morning, however, Wilson had begun

to toss a little with thoughts of Jo. It was of her he first spoke. Stubbs interrupted him sharply.

"See here, m' son," he said with some irritation, "we ain't got but a darned short time in which to work. So th' only way is to mark out a course now and stick to it. While you 've been dreamin' of yer lady-love — which is right an' proper — I 've been thinkin' on how we can git her an' the other thing too. Here 's the pint I hed reached when you interrupted me: first and foremost, ye can't git th' girl until ye gits suthin' to git her with. Sorez ain't a-goin' to listen to you until ye can show him he 's wrong. He ain't goneter b'lieve he 's wrong until ye can show him th' treasure. Secondly, the Priest gent ain't goneter sleep till he finds out what fer we are wanderin' 'round here. Thirdly, when he does find out, it ain't goneter be comfortable, as ye might say, to be seen in this here harbor. Fourthly, it ain't goneter be easy to git away with what we does find with a couple of hundred natives at our heels, which they will be mighty soon. So, says I, we 'd better quit dreamin' an' begin fishin' right erway."

He paused to see what effect this had. Wilson nodded for him to go on.

"Then we 'll take another p'int; this here map starts from the hut where the heathen image lived. Wherefore we 've got ter find thet hut afore we can start. We 've gotter lay our course from thet. So, says I, there 's jus' one thing ter do — hunt fer it lively."

"On the other hand," broke in Wilson, "if Sorez is in danger, the girl is in danger. The treasure is going to be here for a while longer, but maybe the girl won't. If we could combine forces with Sorez ——"

"Well, I'm damned!" growled Stubbs. "See here, m' boy, the only thing that will do is to bring the Priest down on *us*. If Sorez was n't crazy, he would n't have come in here with thet idol with less than a regiment back of him. But he has, an' what we wanter do is ter keep outer the squall he 's in."

"You don't understand the man. He is absolutely fearless. He knows the place — he knows the natives — he knows the Priest. He won't be caught napping."

"Maybe so. Then he don't need us."

Wilson sprang to his feet. He was half ashamed of an obsession which shut out thought of everything else but the girl.

"See here, Stubbs," he blurted out, "you 're right and I 'm a sickly sentimentalist. I 've been thinking so much of her that I 'm not fit for an expedition of this sort. But from now on I 'm under your orders. We 'll get this heathen treasure — and we 'll take it down and show it to Sorez — and we 'll take the girl and fight our way out if we have to. As you say, we have n't much time and we 've got to work hard. We know the hut is near the cone and overlooks the lake. Let 's see ——"

He reached for the map which he had fastened about his neck, but Stubbs checked his hand.

"Easy, boy. Jus' as well not to let the shadders know we has maps. I 've gut my copy here hidden in the grass. S'posin' the hut is in the center; this here docyment mentions two peaks — one 'kissed by the sun' which I take it is the highest, and t' other where 'the trees climb highest.' Now at sea we often lays our course inshore by jus' sech marks. I figgers it out this way; these p'ints bein' startin' p'ints from the hut mus' be somewhere nigh the hut. So if we finds the tallest peak on the horizon an' then the peak on the cone where the trees come up the farthest an' gits the two in line, we 'll have a straight course for the hut. Ain't thet so?"

"Sounds right."

"Maybe it is; maybe it ain't. Anyhow, it 's wuth tryin'. Now I 'm for givin' the burros lots er rope an' lettin' 'em nibble here. Then we 'll hide our provisions in one place an' our ammunition in another and start immedjiate. I 'spect there 's a dozen of them niggers watchin' us. We 'll take a good look roun' fore we begin."

Both men beat the bushes for the radius of a hundred rods or more without, however, bringing to light anything but a few birds. Then Stubbs piled the provisions and blankets together with the picks and shovels into a crevice between the rocks and covered them with dry leaves and bits of sticks. He made another reconnoitre before hiding the ammunition.

This he finally buried in another crevice, covering it so skillfully that not a leaf beneath which it lay looked as though it had been disturbed. He piled a few stones in one place, notched a tree in another, and left a bit of his handkerchief in a third spot, to mark the caché. Then, shouldering their rifles, the two men began the ascent.

Refreshed by their rest and the brisk morning air, they reached the summit easily and once again Wilson gazed down upon the lake now reflecting golden sunbeams until it looked as though it were of molten gold itself. Even Stubbs was moved by its beauty.

"Sorter makes you feel like worshipin' suthin' yerself," he exclaimed.

But he was the practical one of the two, or they would have got no further. His eyes swept the surrounding circle of peaks until they rested upon a majestic pile which so clearly overtopped its fellows as to leave no doubt that this must be the one "kissed by the sun." To the right from where they stood the second landmark was equally distinct, the green creeping up its sides several hundred rods higher than upon the others.

"There ye are!" he exclaimed, pointing them out to Wilson. "Clear as though they was labeled. An' now we can't stand here admirin' the scenery. There ain't no trolley to where we're bound."

He led the way, keeping as closely as possible to the crater's edge. But the path was a rugged one and frequently broken by half-hidden ravines which often

drove them down and in a wide circle around. It was a place for sure feet and sound nerves for they skirted the edge of sheer falls of hundreds of feet. Before they reachd a position opposite the crater peak, they found themselves almost down to the green line again. Here they discovered a sort of trail — scarcely marked more than a sheep path, but still fairly well outlined. They followed this to the top again. When they looked down upon the lake and across to the distant summit, they found the two landmarks in line. But neither to the right nor to the left could they see the hut — that magnet which had drawn them for so many miles over the sea. Stubbs looked disconsolate.

"Well," he said finally, "jus' my luck. Mighter known better."

"But we have n't given up yet," said Wilson. "Did you expect to find a driveway leading to it? You get out to the right and I 'll explore to the left."

Stubbs had not been gone more than ten minutes before he heard a shout from Wilson and hurrying to his side found him peering into a small stone hut scarcely large enough to hold more than a single man.

As the two stood there they felt for the first time the possibilities which lay before them. The quest loomed larger and more real than ever befor. From a half ghost treasure it became a reality. As the first actual proof of the verity of the map which they possessed it gave them a keener vision of what was to come.

"Lord, if it should be true!" gasped Stubbs.

"Man — man, it is!" cried Wilson. "I feel it

tingling through every vein. We are on the very edge of the biggest treasure a man ever found!"

"What — did the paper say there was? Can you remember?"

"Gold plate and jewels — over six hundred pieces. No one knows how valuable they are. Each one might be a fortune in itself."

"Gawd!"

Stubbs sat down on the threshold of the little hut. He drew out his pipe.

"Let 's jus' think on 't a minute," he said.

It was not so much the money value these things represented that appealed to the men. They could not grasp that. Nor was it the intrinsic beauty of the objects themselves. It was just the thrilling consciousness of being within that golden zone which had been sought by so many during so many centuries. Men from the four corners of the earth had come in search of what now lay within a day's reach of them; brave men, men who had made history. Yet they had failed; the mountains had kept their secret and the little blue lake had laughed at their efforts.

Wilson broke the spell. He was feverish with the desire to go farther. It was the exciting finish to a long race; the last move in a puzzle which had challenged men for centuries.

"The map, Stubbs! We must n't stop here now."

Stubbs put up his pipe and unrolled once more the bit of parchment. The directions now seemed brutally calm.

"From where the peaks kiss," he read, "take one hundred strides to the right."

"We must go back to there," said Wilson. "Come on."

He led the way at a run. This starting point was a distance of several hundred yards from the hut itself. From there Wilson took the stated number of steps. He stopped with a start upon the brink of a hidden precipice. The chasm was narrow, scarcely ten feet wide, and from where he stood slanted so that the bottom could not be seen. But a little way to the right of here one looked into a sheer drop which ended in darkness. Wilson wiped his forehead.

"I guess we had better remember what the Priest says about those with unsteady steps. Another yard and I would have gone down."

But Stubbs was again bending over the map.

"The brave do not falter," it read, "for the seeming is not always the true. The path leads down twice the length of a man's body, then ten paces to the left. Again the seeming is not true, for it leads back again and under."

"Lord!" exclaimed Stubbs, "Why could n't he put this in plain English. There is no sense in that."

"The path leads down," repeated Wilson. "That can mean but one thing; it leads over the edge here."

"To what? You get into that hole an' ——"

"Let 's have a closer look."

The opposite side was smooth and sloped in so that it was lost beneath the side upon which they stood.

A man dropping over would strike this slanting surface.

"If we had brought a bit of rope now."

"We 'll have to take the next best thing," said Wilson. "Peel off your coat."

"You don't mean to go over the side, m' son?"

"It 's only twice the length of a man's body," repeated Wilson. "If that is so, I ought to strike something below — a ledge — that we can't see now."

"Better wait until we can get a rope. If it ain't so, you may drop a mile."

"It would take two hours to go back. I believe that phrase 'the seeming is not always the true' means something. Those things were not put in there for nothing. And it is n't likely that such a treasure as this was hidden where it could ever be found by accident."

He had stripped off his coat and stood waiting impatiently for Stubbs. The latter delayed.

"I 'll be damned if you go down there," he said finally. "If anyone goes, it 's me. In these sorter hills ye can't tell how deep a hole is."

"I would n't drop any farther than you."

"Maybe not. But if anyone gits foolish round here, it 's me." He added, looking Wilson squarely in the eyes, "There ain't no one waiting fer me to come back."

But Wilson refused to listen.

"In the first place, I 'm the lighter man, Stubbs; and in the second, I 'm the younger. This is n't a

matter for sentiment, but bull strength. I 'm in earnest, Stubbs; I 'm going."

For a moment Stubbs considered the advisability of attempting to knock him down. It seemed foolish for the boy to risk his life to save a matter of two hours. But when he met again the stubborn eyes and the jaw which was locked upon the resolution, he recognized the futility of further protest. He took off his coat and they tied the two sleeves together.

"Once more afore ye start, boy, — won't ye consider?"

"Stubbs, this is n't like you. There is no danger. Get a good brace with your feet. You won't have to bear the full weight because I can climb a little."

Without more ado Wilson let himself slowly over the edge. He slipped the length of the sleeves, his feet dangling in the air over what depth he did not know. He swung his toes in either direction and felt them strike the opposite wall. He lowered himself a bit more, and his toe rested upon what seemed a firm platform. He was on a projection from the opposite cliff face which slanted under. He let go the sleeve and looked down. He found he could step from here to a narrow path upon the nigh side where at this point the two walls came almost together. He was now beneath the place where he had started, which hung over him like a canopy. The walls again separated below, revealing a dark cavern.

At the end of a few steps taken with his face flat to the rock, he found himself again on a narrow trail

which threaded its way over a yawning chasm. He moved slowly, shuffling one foot ahead and dragging the other after it. In this way he had gone perhaps one hundred feet when the path seemed to come to an abrupt end. His foot dangled over nothing. He almost lost his balance. When he recovered himself, he was so weak and dizzy that it was with difficulty he clung to the rock. In a moment he was able to think. He had been moving on a downward slope and it was probable that this was only a more abrupt descent in the shape of steps. One thing was sure: the path did not end here, if it really was a path, and not a chance formation. The opposite ledge had constantly receded until it was now some thirty feet distant. The path upon which he stood had narrowed until it was scarcely over eighteen inches wide at this spot. There was one other possibility: the ledge at this point might have crumbled and fallen. In his progress he had loosened many stones which rattled downwards out of hearing.

He secured a good balance on his left foot and cautiously lowered the other. Inch by inch he groped down keeping his arms as far outstretched as possible. Finally his toe touched something solid. He ventured an inch farther at the risk of losing his balance. He found a more secure footing and, taking a chance, rested his full weight. The base was firm and he drew down the other foot. He was on a wider path than that above. He paused here for the effort had made his breath come short. It was more the mental

than the physical strain which had weakened him. It was nerve-racking work. The dark and the silence oppressed him. There was almost a tomb-like effect in this slit of the earth where man had not been for centuries. Once he had ventured to shout to Stubbs but his voice had sounded so muffled and the effort had produced in him such a panicky feeling that he did not try it again.

Once more he shuffled forward and once more his foot dangled over nothing. But he had gained more confidence now and lowered it to find another firm base. Two more steps came after this, and then the path proceeded on the level once more. He had gone some forty paces on this last lap when he was brought up against a face of solid rock. He moved his hands over it as far as possible in every direction, but he could not detect any boundaries. It appeared to be a part of the cliff itself. But once more he recalled the warning, "The seeming is not always the true." Then he tried to recall the details of the directions. His map was about his neck but he was in such a position that it would be hazardous to attempt to reach it. In spite of the many times he had read it, he could not now remember a word. The more he tried, the more confused he became.

After all, he had gone farther than he had intended. The thought of returning came as a relief. The next time he would have more confidence and could proceed with less of a strain. And so, step by step, he began to retrace the path. He was forced to keep his cheek

almost flat to the rock. The dry dust sifted into his nostrils and peppered his eyes so that he was beginning to suffer acutely from the inflammation. His arms, too, began to pain him as he had been unable to relieve them at all from their awkward position. The last fifty feet were accomplished in an agony that left him almost too weak to raise his voice. But he braced himself and shouted. He received no response. He lifted his head and reached up an aching arm for the sleeve which he had left dangling over the cliff. It was not there. With a sinking heart he realized that something must have happened to Stubbs. The coats had probably fallen into the chasm below.

CHAPTER XXI

The Hidden Cave

IN the face of this new emergency Wilson, as a real man will, quickly regained control of himself. Some power within forced his aching body to its needs. The first shock had been similar to that which a diver feels when receiving no response to a tug upon the life line. He felt like a unit suddenly hurled against the universe. Every possible human help was removed, bringing him face to face with basic forces. His brain cleared, his swollen and inflamed eyes came to their own, and his aching arms recovered their strength. The fresh shock had thrown these manifestations so far into the background of his consciousness that they were unable to assert themselves.

Stubbs was gone. It was possible, of course, that he lay dead up there within six feet of where Wilson stood, — dead, perhaps, with a knife in his back. But this did not suggest itself so strongly as did the probability that he had been seized and carried off. The Priest, who was undoubtably back of this, would not kill him at once. There was little need of that and he would find him more useful alive than dead.

If there had been a fight — if Stubbs had been given a chance — then, of course, the Priest would have struck hard and decisively. If he had been carried away uninjured, Stubbs would find his way back here. Of that he was sure. The man was strong, resourceful, and would use his last ounce of strength to relieve his partner.

Wilson was in a veritable rat trap. One wall of the cliff projected over his head and the other slanted at such an angle that it was impossible to cling to its smooth surface. And so, although within such a short distance of the top, he was as effectively imprisoned as though he were at the bottom of the chasm. There were just two things possible for him to do; wait where he was on the chance that Stubbs might return, or attempt to trace his way further and reach the cave. If he waited, the dark might catch him there and so he would be forced to remain standing until morning. He had n't the strength left for that. The other course would also be a bitter struggle to the last remaining spark of energy and might leave him face to face with another blank wall. However, that seemed to offer the bigger chance and would bring death, if death must be, more quickly.

He loosened the map from about his throat and, unrolling it, examined it through his smarting eyes. The directions took him almost step by step to the big rock which had barred further progress. He scanned the words which followed.

" The path is locked," it read, " but it opens to the

faithful — to children of the Gilded One. Twelve hands' breadth from the bottom and close to the wall lies the sign. A strong man pressing steadily and with faith against this spot will find the path opened to him."

Twelve hands' breadth from the bottom and close to the wall. But supposing that referred to some real door which had since been blotted out by falling rock — by a later avalanche of which this barrier was a relic? There was but one way to find out and he must decide quickly. Also, he must memorize the other directions, for he would be unable to consult his map in the darkness of the lower chasm.

"Thirty strides on. If the foot stumbles here, the fall is long. To the left ten paces, and then the faithful come to the warmth of the living sun again. The door stands before. Enter ye who are of the Sun; pause if ye be bearded man or unclean."

Twelve handbreadths up and close to the wall; thirty paces on, then ten; so an opening of some sort appeared and near it, the cave. The cave — it lost its meaning as a treasure house. It was a place to relieve the ache which was creeping back to his arms; which would soothe his straining legs. It was a place to lie down in — this hole, hiding pretty jewels and gold plate.

He raised his voice in a final call to Stubbs. It was like calling against a wall; his muffled voice was thrown back in his face. With a start he saw that the light about him was fading. He studied his map for the last time to make sure he had made no mistake, and, folding it, adjusted it once more about his neck.

It was the same laboriously slow process all over again. He shuffled one foot ahead, moved his body squat against the wall, and followed with the other foot. Each time he moved the bitter dust sifted down until it checked his breathing and burned his throat. He had learned to keep his eyes fast closed, but it was a constant effort, for this increased the feeling of dizziness. Always there was a power at his back which drew him out as though he were responding to some powerful magnet. This and the temptation to loosen the tight cords back of his knees — to just let go and sink into relaxation — kept him at a more severe strain than did the actual physical effort.

But more than gold was at stake now, — more than jewels, though they sparkled like stars. The prize for steady legs and unflinching nerves was a respite from Death. If he reached the cave, he would have several days at least before him. Neither thirst nor hunger, fierce masters though they are, can work their will except by slow process. Against them Stubbs would be racing and he had faith in this man.

He did not fear Death itself. In thinking of the end, the bitter thing it meant to him was the taking off of her. And every day meant one day more of her — another chance of finding her and getting her back to God's country and the life which awaited them there. It *did* wait for them; in coming here they had left the true course of their life, but it remained for them to take it up when once they should make the beaten tracks again. Now he was trembling along the

ragged edge of losing it all — all that lay behind and all that lay before. But if this was to be so, why had he ever seen that face in the misty dark? why had he come upon her the second and the third time? why had Chance brought him to her across ten thousand miles of sea? why had it brought him here? Why at the beginning could he not have forgotten her as one forgets those who flit into one's life and out again? He did not believe in a jesting God.

One foot forward, the body flat against the wall, a little choke from the dust, then the other foot after. A pause to catch the breath, then — one foot forward, the body flat against the wall, a little choke from the dust, then the other foot after. Also he must pause to remember that it was twelve hands up, close to the wall, thirty paces on, then ten.

Odd things flash through a mind long at a tension. In the midst of his suffering he found time to smile at the thought that life had reduced itself to such a formula. A single error in this sing-song, such as ten hands up instead of twelve, — *was* it ten or twelve? Ten hands up and close to the wall — twelve hands up and close to the wall — they sounded alike. Each fell equally well into the rhythm of his song. He stopped in the grip of a new fear. He had forgotten, and, trying to recall the rest, he found he had forgotten that too. His mind was a jumble so that now he did not dare to put out his right foot at all without first feeling with his toe a little beyond.

But this passed soon, and his thoughts returned to her, which steadied him instantly. So he came safely to the single step down and accomplished this. Then the other and accomplished that. At the end of a few paces farther he faced the great rock. It had become dark down here now, — so dark that he could not see six inches ahead. His foot had come against the rock, and then he had felt up with his hands. He found it impossible to stoop sufficiently accurately to measure from the bottom. There was nothing for it but to guess — to try again and again until either it gave or he proved that it would not give.

He placed his hand upon the rock at about the height of his chest and threw his weight forward. It was as though he were trying to push the mountain itself to one side. He tried above, below, to the right, to the left without result. Nothing discouraged, he began again, starting from as low as he could reach and pressing with all his strength at intervals of a few inches. Suddenly, like a door opened from within, the rock toppled to the right where it hung balanced over the precipice, leaving an opening two feet wide. It would have been a tight squeeze for Stubbs, but Wilson easily jammed through. He saw that the path continued at a slightly downward slope.

"Thirty paces on and ten to the left."

He repeated the words parrot fashion and his feet obeyed the instructions automatically. The thirty paces ended so near the edge of crumbling rock that it fell away beneath his toe leaving some two inches

over nothing. Had a man walked here without directions, he certainly would have taken this last step and been hurled into the space below. It was pitch dark where he stood. He felt along the wall for the opening which should take him to the left ten paces. The wall, the path, the depth below the path were all one save to touch alone. It was as though he himself had been deadened to every sense but this. During the last few minutes his brain, too, had dulled so that all he now grasped of the great happy world outside was a vague memory of blue sky before which a shadowy figure danced like a will-o'-the-wisp. But still propelled by the last instinct to leave man before the soul, he put one foot ahead of him, pressed his body flat to the wall, and drew the other after. As he proceeded thus, counting the steps he took, he became aware that the air was fresher. Ahead, he saw an opening which was a little less dark than this which stifled him. It was light, though he saw it only faintly through blurred eyes. It was a gray slit coming together at the top. He groped his way almost to the edge and then to the left he saw a second opening — an opening into another dark. It was the cave. He staggered the few remaining feet and fell prone upon its granite floor.

How long he remained so he could not tell. He was not wholly unconscious, but in a state so bordering upon it that he realized nothing but the ecstatic relief which came to his aching body. Still he was able to realize that. Also he knew that he had reached his

journey's end, so far as anything more he could do was concerned. He would wait — wait as long as possible — cling to the very last second of life. He must do that for her. That was all that was left.

His slowly fading senses flickered back. He roused himself and sat up. In the gloom back of him he made out nothing: the opening was becoming obliterated by the dark without, so that he felt as though in a sealed box — a coffin almost. He felt an impulse to shout, but his dry lips choked this back. He could not sit still. He must act in some way. He rose to his hands and knees and began to grope about without any definite object. There was something uncanny in the thought that this silence had not been broken for centuries. He thought of it as his toes scraped along the granite behind him. Once when he put out his hands near the cave opening, they fell upon what felt like cloth. Something gave before his touch with a dry rattle as of bones. He drew back with the morbid thought that they really *were* bones. Perhaps some other poor devil had made his way here and died.

He felt a craving, greater at first even than his thirst, for light. If only the moon came in here somewhere; if only he could find wood to make a fire. He had a few matches, but these he must keep for something more important than catering to a fear. He turned back to the cave mouth, pressing forward this time to the very edge. He saw opposite him another sheer face of rock which came in parallel to this in which he was imprisoned. His eyes fell below to a

measureless drop. But the moon was shining and found its way down into these depths. With his eyes still down he bathed in this. Then, with returning strength, he turned to the left and his heart came into his throat. There was still more light; but, greater joy than this, he caught sight far below him of a pool of liquid purple. The cold, unshimmering rays of the moon played upon it in silver paths. It was the lake — the lake upon whose borders it was possible she stood at that very moment, perhaps looking up at these cliffs. It looked such a gentle thing — this lake. Within its calm waters another moon shone and about its edges a fringe of dark where the trees threw their shadows. He thrust his body out as far as possible to see more of it. The light and the color were as balm to his eyes. But it brought back another fever; how he would like to thrust his hot head into its depths and drink, drink, drink! The idea pressed in upon him so strongly, with such insane persistence, that he felt as though if he got very near the edge and took a firm grip with his toes, he could reach the water in a jump. It was worth trying. If he took a long breath, and got just the right balance — he found himself actually crouching. He fell back from this danger, but he could n't escape his thirst. He must find water. The dry dust had sifted into his throat — his lungs.

His thoughts now centered on nothing else but this. Water stood for everything in the world — for the world itself, because it meant life. Water — water —

nothing else could quench the fever which tore at his throat like a thing with a million sharp claws — nothing else could clear his brain — nothing else put the strength back into his legs.

Back into the cave he pressed — back into the unknown dark. The flinty sides were cool. He stopped to press his cheeks against them, then licked them with his dry tongue. Back — back away from the temptation to jump, he staggered. Another step, for all he knew, might plunge him into some dark well; but even so, it would n't matter much. There might be water at the bottom. Now and then he paused to listen, for it seemed to him he caught the musical tinkling of dripping water. He pictured a crystal stream such as that in which when a boy he used to fish for trout, tinkling over the clean rock surface, — a sparkling, fairy waterfall where at the bottom he might scoop up icy handfuls.

He tried to pierce the dark to where this sound seemed to be. He struck one of his precious matches. The flame which he held before him was repeated a thousand times, in a shining pool to the left. With a throaty, animal-like cry, he threw himself forward and plunged his hands into the pool. They met a cutting surface of a hundred little stones. He groped all around; nothing but these little stones. He grabbed a handful of them and struck another match. This was no pool of water — this was not a crystal spring — it was nothing but a little pile of diamonds. In a rage he flung them from him.

Jewels — jewels when he wanted water! Baubles of stone when he thirsted! Surely the gods here who guarded these vanities must be laughing. If each of these crystals had only been a drop of that crystal which gives life and surcease to burning throats, — if only these bits could resolve themselves into that precious thing which they mocked with their clearness!

Maddened by the visions these things had summoned, he staggered back to the opening. At least he must have air — big, cooling draughts of air. It was the one thing which was left to him. He would bathe in it and drink it into his hot lungs. He moved on his hands and knees with his head dropped low between them like a wounded animal. It was almost as though he had become a child once more — life had become now so elemental. Of all the things this big world furnished, he wanted now but that one thing which it furnishes in such abundance. Just water — nothing else. Water of which there were lakes full and rivers full; water which thundered by the ton over crags; water which flooded down over all the earth. And this, the freest of all things, was taken from him while that for which men cut one another's throats was flung in his face. Yes, he had become just a child once more, — a child mouthing for the breast of Nature.

When he reached the opening he dropped flat with his head over the chasm. His blurred eyes could still see one thing — the big, cool lake where the moon laughed back at herself, — the big cool lake where the

water bathed the shores, — the big cool lake where Jo slept.

Jo — love — life — these were just below him. And behind him, within reach of his weak fingers, lay a useless half billion in precious stones. So he fought for life in the center of the web.

CHAPTER XXII

The Taste of Rope

STUBBS was lying flat upon his chest staring anxiously down into the fissure where Wilson had disappeared when suddenly he felt a weight upon his back and another upon each of his outstretched arms. In spite of this, he reached his knees, but the powerful brown men still clung. He shook himself as a mad bull does at the sting of the darts. It was just as useless. In another minute he was thrown again, and in another, bound hand and foot with a stout grass rope. Without a word, as though he were a slain deer, he was lifted to their shoulders and ignominiously carted down the mountain side. It was all so quickly done that he blinked back at the sun in a daze as though awaking from some evil dream. But his uncomfortable position soon assured him that it was a reality and he settled into a sullen rage. He had been captured as easily as a drunken sailor is shanghaied.

They never paused until they lowered him like a bundle of hay within a dozen feet of where he had tethered his burros. Instantly he heard a familiar voice jabbering with his captors. In a few minutes

the Priest himself stepped before him and studied him curiously as he rolled a cigarette.

"Where is the other?" he asked.

"Find him," growled Stubbs.

"Either I or the Golden One will find him, — that is certain. There is but one pass over the mountain," he added in explanation.

"Maybe. What d' ye want of us, anyway?"

The Priest flicked the ashes from his cigarette.

"What did *you* want — by the hut yonder? Your course lay another way."

"Ain't a free man a right up there?"

"It is the shrine of the Golden One."

"It ain't marked sech."

"But you have learned — now. It is better in a strange country to learn such things before than afterwards."

"The same to you — 'bout strange people."

The Priest smoked idly a few minutes longer.

"Where is the other?" he asked again.

"Ask your Golden Man."

"He knows only the dead. Shall I wait?"

"Jus' as you damned please," growled Stubbs.

He saw no use in trying to pacify this devil. Even if he had seen a hope, it would have gone too much against him to attempt it. He felt the same contempt for him that he would of a mutinous sailor; he was just bad, — to be beaten by force and nothing else.

The yellow teeth showed between the thin lips.

"The bearded men are like kings until — they lie prostrate like slaves."

Stubbs did not answer. His thoughts flew back to Wilson. He pictured his return to find his partner gone. Would he be able to climb out of that ill-fated hole without aid? It was possible, but if he succeeded, he might fall into worse hands. At any cost he must turn suspicion aside from that particular spot. Apparently it had as yet no especial significance, if its existence were known at all, to the natives.

"My partner," said Stubbs, deliberately, "has gone to find the girl."

"And you waited for him — up there in the sun?"

"Maybe."

"He had better have remained with you."

"There would have been some dead niggers if he had."

"My friend," said the Priest, "before morning I shall know if you have told the truth this time. In the meanwhile I shall leave you in the company of my children. I hope you will sleep well."

"D' ye mean to keep me tied like this till morning?"

"I see no other way."

"Then damn your eyes if ——"

But he bit off the phrase and closed his eyes against the grinning face before him. As a matter of fact, he had made a discovery which brought with it a ray of hope. He found that with an effort he was able to bring his teeth against the rope where it passed over his shoulder. His hands were tied behind his back,

but with the slack he would gain after gnawing through the rope, he would be able to loosen them. They had taken his revolver, but they had overlooked the hunting knife he always carried within his shirt suspended from his neck — a precaution which had proved useful to him before. The very thing he now hoped for was that they would leave him as he was.

The Priest departed and did not appear again. The three brown men settled down on their haunches and fell into that state of Indian lethargy which they were able to maintain for days, every sense resting but still alert. With their knees drawn up to their chins they chewed their coca leaves and stared at their toes, immovable as images. Stubbs looked them over; they did not appear to be strong men. Their arms and legs were rounded like those of women, and their chests were thin. He wondered now why he had not been able to shake them off.

Stubbs settled back to wait, but every now and then he deliberately tossed, turning from his back to his side and again to his back. He had two objects in mind; to keep the watchmen alert so that the strain would tell eventually in dulled senses, and to throw them off their guard when the time came that the movements really meant something. But they never even looked up; never shifted their positions. Each had by his side a two-edged sword, but neither revolver nor rifle. His own Winchester still lay in the grass near the hut, if they had not stolen it.

In this way several hours passed before he made the

first move towards escape. They gave him neither water nor nourishment. So he waited until dark. Then he turned his head until his teeth rested upon the rope. He remained in this position without moving for ten minutes and then slowly, carefully began to nibble. The rope was finely knit and as tough as raw hide. At the end of a half hour he had scarcely made any impression at all upon it. At the end of an hour he had started several strands. The wiry threads irritated his lips and tongue so that they soon began to bleed, but this in turn softened the rope a trifle. The three brown men never stirred. The stars looked down impartially upon the four; also upon the girl by the lake and the man in the cave. It was all one to them.

He gnawed as steadily and as patiently as a rat. Each nibble soon became torture, but he never ceased save to toss a bit that the guards might not get suspicious. The dark soon blurred their outlines, but he had fixed their positions in his mind so that he could have reached them with his eyes shut. At the end of the third hour he had made his way half through the rope. It took him two hours more to weaken one half of the remainder. The pain was becoming unendurable. He quivered from head to foot each time he moved his jaw, for his lips were torn to the quick. His tongue was shredded; his chest damp with blood. Finally he ceased. Then carefully, very carefully, threw back his shoulders so as to bring a strain to the rope. He felt it pull apart, and sank to rest a bit.

Apparently he lay without moving. The brown men were like dead men. But inch by inch he had drawn the rope slack until he was able to unwind it from his wrists. Then by half inches he moved his hands free, slipping one of them from behind him to his side. It seemed to him as though Nature herself had paused to watch and listen. He turned now with his free hand beneath him. Slowly his fingers crept towards his chest, grasped the sheath, freed the blade, and then back to his side once more. He turned to his back, his hand behind him, his fingers grasping the horn handle.

His feet were still bound, but he figured that he could raise himself to a sitting posture and sever these with a single slash at the moment he sprang. But he must be quick — must be strong — must be calm. To this end he stretched himself upon his back and waited. If he were able to kill the first man with a single blow, he felt he would stand more than an equal chance with the two others. He was an adept in the use of the knife.

In a flash he was upright; in another he had cut through the rope on his ankles. He leaped forward, striking deep as his feet touched the earth. The knife sank to the hilt in the brown body. One of the others was reaching for his sword as Stubbs struck home again. But as he drew out his knife, the third was rushing for him with his long sword in his hands. He never reached him. With the skill of long experience, Stubbs threw his knife with the speed of an arrow

from a bow. It struck the man just above the heart and he stumbled over his own feet. Stubbs melted into the shadow of the trees.

Once out of sight of the scene of this struggle, he stopped and listened. If this were all of them, there were several things he would get before he returned to the heights. A light breeze rustled the heavy tops above him, but otherwise the world seemed sound asleep. There was not the cracking of a twig — not the movement of a shadow. He ventured back. The three forms, save that they had settled into awkward positions, looked very much as they had a few minutes ago when they had stood between him and freedom. He passed them, stopping to recover his knife, and then moved on to where he had hidden the provisions. He took a rope, a can of beef, some crackers, and a small quantity of coca leaves. Then he went to the spring nearby and soothed his sore throat and mouth with water. He also filled a quart flask which he tied behind him. Returning to the caché, he covered it up again and, placing a roll of the coca leaves beneath his tongue, started on the ascent.

The dawn was just appearing in a flush of pink when he reached the top. A reconnaisance of the rocks around the hut and at the entrance to the crevice convinced him that no guards had been left here. Evidently the Priest had not thought their capture of supreme importance. It was more an act of precaution than anything else.

He felt more refreshed at the top of the peak than

he had at the bottom and, wondering at this, it suddenly occurred to him that this was the effect of the coca leaves. He had heard in Bogova that the natives under its influence were able to endure incredible hardships without other nourishment of any kind. He took a larger mouthful. At any rate, they acted as balm upon his tongue and macerated lips. He felt no inclination to rest. Even had he felt fatigue, his anxiety over Wilson would have forbidden further delay.

He fastened one end of his rope securely about a point of rock and then sat down to study the map once more. He realized that he would need the help of every detail of these directions. Already he had committed them to memory, — he was calmer than Wilson about it and so had remembered them better, — but he went over them once more. There was more than treasure at stake this time.

He lowered himself into the crevice which had swallowed up his companion, with almost a sense of relief at being for the moment beyond the power of the Priest. He was tempted to cut the rope behind him, but a brief examination convinced him that this would be foolhardy. He still had sufficient left for an emergency — in case the rope was drawn up from above. Two men should stand a better chance of getting out of here than would a single man.

At the end of the first ten feet along the narrow path Stubbs felt much less confident than at the start that Wilson was alive. And he worked his way along the

dangerous course with increasing fear. It was with a gasp of relief that he finally saw the opening ahead of him which marked the end. He paused to shout. He received no reply. He called his comrade's name again. The dark walls about him caught his voice and imprisoned it.

Taking new risks, he pushed ahead. To the left he saw the cave mouth. He stopped once more, half fearing what he should find, and ran the remaining steps. At the entrance to the cave itself he stumbled over a prostrate body.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Spider Snaps

STOOPING, Stubbs ran his hand down the length of Wilson's arm and felt for his pulse. He caught a weak but steady beat. Prying open his mouth, he poured a large mouthful of water down the dry throat. Wilson quickly revived and begged for more.

"No, m' son, this 'll do fer now. You 'll need it worse later on. An' I 'm darned glad to see yer again."

"How — how long have I been here, Stubbs?" panted Wilson.

"Nigh twenty-four hours."

"A day — a whole day wasted!"

"An' another cross agin yer fren' the Priest."

"Was it he?"

"Th' same."

He gave Wilson a little food and a wisp of the coca leaves to chew and briefly told him what he had just been through. He concluded with a wave of his hand about him.

"So here we are at last, an' a crew of savages waitin' fer us at the top, which makes a fine and fittin' end fer any v'yage upon which I embarks."

"Water — give me more water."

Stubbs rested the bottle to the man's lips a moment and then had to fight with him to get it away.

"Now," said Stubbs, "if ye 've gut th' breath, tell me, has ye explored at all?"

Wilson shook his head. He answered vaguely, his thoughts still upon the one thing.

"A day wasted and the Priest on his way! He said within a day, did n't he, Stubbs? Lord! we 've got to get out of here; we 've got to get to her. He 'll kill them both ——"

Wilson struggled to his feet and plunged towards the exit to the cave. Stubbs was upon him in a second and bore him down.

"Gawd, man, h'ain't yer any sense left at all?"

A second later he repented his sharp speech, and added,

"There, lay still a moment, lad. I knows how yer feel, but we might 's well look aroun' an' find out how much bigger damned fools we are. Ye 've gotter git yer strength before ye can move back over that course."

"The treasure is there," whispered Wilson; "but, Stubbs, I want more water — buckets of it."

"What 's there?"

"Diamonds — diamonds, and not a drop of water."

Stubbs did not believe it. He took it to be the hallucination of a man weak with thirst. But one thing was settled in his mind: if the cave were empty, he would n't waste any more time here. Danger was increasing with every minute. He pawed his way

into the rear of the cave and had not gone ten feet before he stumbled over the same pile Wilson had found. He seized a handful of the stones and made his way back to the light.

The jewels sparkled in his rough palm like chips from the stars themselves. They were of all sizes from a beechnut to a pecan. Even roughly cut and polished as they were, they still flashed back their rainbow hues with pointed brilliancy. He picked out a large yellow diamond which even in this dim light glowed like molten gold in a fog; another which imprisoned the purple of the night sky; and another tinged with the faint crimson of an afterglow. Jumbled together in his hand, they were a scintillating pile of tiny, living stars, their rays fencing in a dazzling play of light. Even to Stubbs, who knew nothing of the stones, they were so fascinating that he turned them over and over with his finger to watch their twinkling iridescence.

Just those he held there now were such as a lapidary would spend his life willingly in the getting. If not another stone were found in the cave, these alone represented a fortune worthy of the expedition. Each stone as it stood was worth probably from three to eight hundred dollars, and some of the larger would run into the thousands. It was difficult to realize their full value here where they counted for so little, — no more than the rays of the stars themselves, — here where so many others lay in a heap like broken glass. Vaguely Stubbs grasped the fact that he had in his possession the worth of many good ships and

freedom for the rest of his life. Yet he thrilled less with this thought than he did with the sheer joy of discovery. A man will cherish a dime he picks up on the street more than he does a five-dollar bill in his pocket. It was this spirit of treasure-trove that got into his blood, sending a tingle of new life through his veins. He tried to rouse Wilson to it.

"Come here, man," he shouted. "Come here and see what we've got. God! there's millions in this cave!"

But Wilson lifted his head indifferently.

"I don't give a damn," he answered.

"You have n't seen 'em sparkle — you have n't gut it inter yer head! Ye're rich — richer than Danbury!"

He hurried back to where Wilson sat and thrust the jewels before his eyes.

"D' ye see 'em?" he cried excitedly. "Bigger 'n yer thumb?"

For a second his old-time suspicion and doubt returned.

"But maybe," he added sorrowfully, "maybe they're jus' glass. Jus' my luck."

Nevertheless he believed sufficiently in them to return to the quest. He struck match after match, wandering farther and farther into the darkness, hoping to find something with which he could make light enough to see around him. He gave a little cry of joy as he came upon an old-time altar light — a platter of oil containing a crude wick. He lighted this.

The flame sputtered feebly, died down, then revived to a big, steady flame. With his arms at his side, his mouth wide open, he gaped at what the light revealed.

The cave was not large; this lamp disclosed its boundaries. It also disclosed other things, chief of which was a leering idol some three feet tall which squatted, cross-legged, with one hand extended. This hand held a polished diamond larger than a walnut. The eyes were of ruby which, catching the light, burned with ghoul-like ferocity, while the mouth grinned, — grinned with a smile which strangely resembled that of the Priest. The image was of gold. To the right and left, piled up as though they had been hastily thrown together, was a jumble of vases, bowls, plates, shields, all of beaten gold. They made a heap some four feet high, and from six to eight feet broad at the base. Strewn about the foot of this were many little leather bags tied at the top with dried sinews.

Minute after minute Stubbs stared at this sight in silence. There was more gold here than he thought existed in the world, — so much that it lost its value. Here was enough almost to load down a ship. If he could crowd a few hundred dollars into a bag small enough to stuff into his pocket, this must run up into the millions. He had always spoken of a man worth a million with a certain amount of awe and doubt; and here lay ten, perhaps fifty, times that amount. At the end of forty years of sailing the seas he had saved a little over three thousand dollars against the days he should be old and feeble. Three

Minute after minute Stubbs stared at this sight in silence.

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thousand dollars! Two or three of those stones he had slipped into his pocket, — four or five of these plates of which there were hundreds!

He moved forward and tried to lift one of the big vases of crudely beaten gold. With his full weight against it, he could scarcely move it. Farther on there was a bar of gold heavier than three men could carry. To the left of this there was a pile of golden shields studded with jewels, strange ornaments, and heavy plates. Back of this he caught a glimpse of still other ingots of gold in the shadows.

And always the big image held extended towards him with a cynical leer the big, polished diamond which seemed rather to give out light from within itself than to reflect the altar flames. It blazed with a brilliancy that he had never seen equalled save by the stars on faultless winter nights.

He was too dumbfounded at first to take it all in. He turned about in a circle, resting his eyes again upon one thing after another, and then raised his hand and looked at that to make sure that he was seeing correctly — was not the victim of some strange illusion. Yes, his eyes were all right; he saw his calloused, big-jointed hand — the hand which had labored so long for a millionth part of what he now saw here. The gold and the jewels were within arms' reach of him — there was no longer any doubt about that. His luck must have turned.

He moved back to where Wilson still lay sprawled out upon his back only half conscious of his sur-

roundings. He tried to speak calmly, but he blurted out,

"Gawd, man, there 's tons of it!"

Wilson did not move or speak.

"Shiploads of it. Man! Man! wake up an' see what 's afore yer eyes!"

"What is it, Stubbs?"

"Gold! Gold! Gold! The stuff thet outside here yer haster fight ter git a pinch of, — the stuff I 've sailed aroun' the worl' ter git a handful of; the stuff ye 've come so far on the bare chance of seein'."

"It 's here, then? The treasure is here?"

"More than ever ye dreamed of. Small wonder that Sorez was willin' ter take chances agin the Priest if he knew of this."

Wilson brushed his hand over his eyes. The name roused him. This meant getting back to Sorez — getting back to him with proof of the treasure and so releasing the girl. He made his feet and stood a moment with his hand upon Stubbs' shoulder.

"I 'm glad, Stubbs," he answered. "Now — now let 's get back to her."

"Aye, we 'll get back, but first we 've got ter figger out some way for gittin' of this stuff out."

As a matter of fact, they learned that they were really facing something of a problem. It was a marvel how ever these things were got down here, but it would be a still greater task to get them out again. Twenty fanatical worshipers of the Sun God gave their lives to bearing these priceless offerings from the lake to

this cave with the incentive of winning everlasting happiness. It was a different problem for two tired and nerve-exhausted men to retrace their steps.

Even if it were possible to get the treasure to the surface, it would need a small army of men and burros to carry it over the mountains to civilization, and another small army to defend it while on the journey. It would be almost equally impossible, probably, for them ever again to reach this cave. If they were successful in getting out of this country alive now that the Priest was roused and the natives incensed over the death of their fellows, it certainly would be sure death ever to return. As for organizing a company either at Bogova or in America for the purpose of removing the treasure, Stubbs had the usual independent man's distrust of such means. It became clearer to him every minute that the only share of this hoard of which they ever could be sure was what they might now take out with them. This practically eliminated the vast store of golden implements, for it was impossible to carry even the smallest of them on their shoulders over so rough and dangerous a trail as this. It began to look as though they had reached this treasure at length merely to be tantalized by it. The very thought was like a nightmare.

His eyes fell upon the small leather bags. Stooping, he picked up one of them, untied it and poured its contents upon the cave floor; a flashing stream of rubies rippled out and glowed at his feet in a tiny, blood-red heap. And there were a dozen more of these bags in sight!

"Lord, man!" he exclaimed below his breath, "it 's 'nuff to make yer b'lieve ye 're dreamin'."

The jewels gave him fresh courage. Here, at any rate, was a fortune which was within their present reach. They could carry these things back with them even though they were forced to leave the bulk of the treasure in its heavier form. A single one of these little leather bags was sufficient to repay them for their trouble if they did n't get anything else. But one thing was sure — their single chance of escaping with even these was to start at once. The Priest would undoubtedly have the whole region up in arms before dark, and, if he did n't find them before, would have a force at the mountain pass. It went against his grain to abandon such riches as these, but life and a few million was better than death with all the gold in the world piled about your tomb.

To Wilson, who in the last few minutes had become more himself, the treasure still meant just one thing — the opportunity of freeing Jo. With this evidence he could return to Sorez and persuade him of the futility of his search in the lake itself and induce him to join his party and escape while there was time. If he did n't succeed in this, he would take the girl even if he had to do so by force.

"It 's a case of grab and jump," said Stubbs. "You gather up the loose stones on the floor and I 'll collect the bags. The sooner we gets to the top, th' better."

Stubbs took the altar light and made a careful search of the bottom of the cave for jewels. These were

the things which embodied in the smallest weight the most value. It made him groan every time he passed an ingot of gold or some massive vase which he knew must run into the thousands, but at the end of ten minutes he felt better; the stones alone were sufficient to satisfy even the most avaricious. About the base of the grinning idol they found fourteen leather bags, each filled with gems. The loose diamonds which had been roughly thrown into a small pile would fill four bags more. Even Wilson became roused at sight of these. He began to realize their value and the power such wealth would give him. If the girl was still alive, he now had the means of moving an army to her aid. If she was still alive — but the day was waning and the Priest, now thoroughly aroused, doubtless moving towards her intent upon wiping out every stranger, man or woman, in the hills.

Stubbs was for going farther back into the cave and exploring some of the recesses into which they had not yet looked at all. But Wilson, with returning strength, became impatient again. The coca leaves which he had chewed constantly brought him new life.

"Lord! would you sell the girl for a few more bags of jewels, Stubbs?" he burst out.

The latter straightened instantly and came nearer. But before he had time to speak, Wilson apologized.

"No, I know better, comrade, but I can't wait any longer to get to her. I 'm five years older than I was a day ago."

The while they were gathering the little bags full of

jewels, the big image in the corner smiled his smile and offered them the big diamond in his hand; the while they buckled the bags about their waists — as precious belts as ever men wore — the image smiled and offered; as they moved towards the mouth of the cave it still insisted. Yet for some reason neither man had felt like taking the stone. Stubbs felt a bit superstitious about it, while Wilson felt enough reverence, even for heathen gods, to refrain. But still it smiled and offered. In the flickering flare of the altar light the stone burned with increasing brilliancy. It was as though it absorbed the flames and, adding new fuel, flashed them forth again.

Wilson led the way out. Before they left the cave Stubbs turned. He saw the image once again, and once again the stone. The temptation was too great, especially now that they were on the point of leaving — perhaps forever. He started back and Wilson tried to check him.

"I would n't, Stubbs. Those eyes look too ugly. It is only the mouth that smiles and ——"

"Ye have n't turned heathen yerself, have ye?" he called back.

He stepped forward and clutched it. But the jewel was fastened in some way although it seemed a bit loose. He pulled strongly upon it and the next second leaped back, warned in time by a suspicious rumbling above his head. He looked down to see a slab of granite weighing half a ton on the spot where he had stood a moment before. It was an ingenious bit of

mechanism arranged to protect the treasure; the jewel had been attached by a stout cord which, when pulled, loosed the weight above. Not only this, but it became evident in a few seconds that it loosed also other forces — whether by design or chance, the two men never determined. They had pressed back to the path outside the cave, when they heard a rumble like distant thunder, followed instantly by a grinding and crashing. Before their eyes a large section of the cliff crashed down over the cave itself and into the chasm below. They did n't wait to see what followed, but made their way along the path as fast as they dared.

Neither man spoke again until a half hour later after a journey that was like a passage through Hell, they lay exhausted in the sunlight above the chasm. The thunder of tumbling rock still pounded at their ears.

CHAPTER XXIV

Those in the Hut

IN an angle formed by two cliff sides, within a stone's throw of the lake of Guadiva, a native, Flores by name, had built himself a hut. Here he lived with his mate Lotta in a little Nirvana of his own, content with his love and his task of tending a flock of sheep which furnished them both with food and clothing. Few came near this hut. The sky above, the lake before, and the mountains round about were all his, his and his alone even as was the love of the dark-eyed woman near him. Within their simple lives they had sounded the depths of despair and reached the heights of bliss.

The woman Lotta was the daughter of a chieftain of the tribe of Chibca, one whose ancestry went far back into the history of the Golden One. Some of them had been priests, some of them guards, and all of them had fought hard for their god. But the father of this girl incurred the displeasure of the Priest and finally, not yielding to discipline, his wrath. The stern autocrat of these tribes condemned him to extreme punishment — a fast of thirty days in the hut upon the mountain top — the hut of the Golden God.

Cowed and frightened, the man, somewhat feeble with sickness, bade good-bye to his daughter and climbed the rugged path. Below, the girl waited day after day until the strain became unbearable. She ventured, knowing well what the penalty was, to visit him with food. She found him groaning upon the stone floor, eaten by fever and racked with pain. She nursed him until her supplies were exhausted and then came down for more, choosing a secret path which she in her rambles as a girl had discovered. It was then she heard whispered among the gossips news of a white stranger with marvelous powers who was hiding in the hut of a neighbor. It was just after the battle with the men from the sea — a battle terrible in its ferocity. This man was one of the refugees from the scattered army, sheltered at first for gold and later because of the power he possessed of stopping pain. A wounded native, member of the family which sheltered him, had been brought in suffering agonies and the stranger had healed him with the touch of a tiny needle. Lotta heard these things and that night found the stranger's hiding place and begged him to follow. He knew enough of the native language to understand and — to make his bargain. If she would guide him to the mountain pass, he would follow.

The man was Sorez.

The next few hours were burned into Sorez' mind forever. At her heels he had clawed his way up the steep hillside expecting at every step a spear thrust in his back. He tore his hands and knees, but, drawn

on by a picture of the girl, moving shadow-like in the moonlight ahead of him, he followed steadily after. Pausing for breath once he saw the dark fringe of trees below the lava slopes, the twinkle of the camp fires, and over all the clear stars. But this region here was a dead region. He felt as if he were moving through some inferno, some ghastly haunt of moaning specters, with the dark-faced girl guiding him like some dead love. On they climbed in silence until his head began to swim with the exertion and the rarefied air. Suddenly the girl disappeared as though she had dropped over a precipice. To the left he saw a small path leading over a yawning chasm. She beckoned and he felt his way along. Then they came upon a tiny plateau upon which had been built a hut of rocks.

The scene within was terrible. Upon the stone floor lay a brown-skinned skeleton with bulging eyes and clawing fingers muttering incoherently. Sorez could do nothing but administer a small injection of the soothing drug, but this brought instant relief and with it a few moments of sanity. The doctor had picked up a small vocabulary and gathered from what the dying man muttered that he, Sorez, a very much bruised and weary mortal, was being mistaken for one from heaven. A smile lighted the haggard face of the invalid and the bony hands came together in prayer. The girl bent over him and then drew back in horror. She met the eyes of her father in some new-found wonder, gasping for breath. Then she bent her ear once more. The message, whatever it was, was repeated. Still, as

though half doubting, she moved to the rear of the hut and pounded with a large rock against what was apparently the naked face of the cliff in which the hut was built. It swung in, revealing a sort of shrine. Within this reposed a golden image. She turned her eyes again upon her father and then without hesitation took out the idol and handed it to Sorez.

"The God of Gods," she whispered, bending low her head.

"But I don't want your god," protested the doctor.

"You must. He says it is for you to guard."

He had taken it carelessly to humor the dying man. And when the latter closed his eyes for all time, Sorez remembered that the heathen image was still in his possession. He started to return it to the shrine, but the girl threw herself before him.

"No. The trust is yours."

Well, it would be a pleasant memento of an incident that was anything but pleasant. He brought it down the mountain side and put it beneath his blanket.

It was not until several days later that bit by bit he came to a realization of that which he had so lightly taken. The old man who brought his food whispered the news through ashen lips.

"The Golden One is gone."

"Who is the Golden One?"

"The Golden God in the hut above who guards the secret of the sacred treasure. It is said that some day this image will speak and tell where the lost altar lies."

The whole tribe was in the grip of an awful terror

over this disappearance. But the Priest proved master of the situation.

"It will be found," he said.

In the excitement Sorez found his opportunity to escape, with the help of the girl, the image still beneath his coat, — the image fated to light in him the same fires which drove on Raleigh and Quesada. Before he reached the home trail he had a chance to see this strange Priest of whom he had heard so much in connection with the rumored treasure in the lake. He came upon him, a tall, sallow-faced man, when within an hour of safety. Sorez had never before met eyes such as looked from beneath the skull-like forehead of this man; they bored, bored like hot iron. The Priest spoke good English.

"Leave the image," he said quietly.

Sorez, his hand upon a thirty-two caliber revolver, laughed (even as Quesada had laughed) and disappeared in the dark. The next time he met the Priest was many months later and many thousand miles from the Andes.

The girl who, at the command of her father, had given Sorez the image was made an exile in consequence of this act by a decree of the priest. But the thread of love is universal. It is the strain out of which springs all idealism — even the notion of God — and as such is bounded by neither time nor place. It is in the beating hearts of all things human — the definition perhaps of humanity. Civilization differs from savagery in many things, but both have in common,

er all, whatever is eternal; and love is the thing
ne which we know to be eternal. Just human love
love of man for woman and woman for man.
Flores followed her into the mountains among which
y had both grown. He builded a shelter for her,
ght sheep and toiled for her, and with her, found
best of all that a larger life brings to many. The
est, of course, could have easily annihilated the
, but he hesitated. There was something in the
rts of his people with which he dare not tamper.
the two had been able to live their idyl in peace,
ugh Flores slept always with one eye open and his
fe near.
t was quite by accident that Sorez and the tired girl
ıe upon the two at the finish of his second journey
) these mountains. The woman in the hut recog-
ed him instantly and bade him welcome. The one-
m structure was given up to the women while Flores
lt near it a leanto for himself and Sorez. This
plified things mightily for the exhausted travelers,
l gave them at once the opportunity for much-needed
. They slept the major part of two days, but Sorez
in showed his remarkable recuperative powers by
ıking with all his old-time strength of body and
ıd. He accepted the challenge of the lake and
ıntains with all his former fearlessness. He
ught no more of the danger which lurked near him
n he did of the possible failure of his expedition.
was this magnificent domination of self, this utter
rn of circumstance, which made such a situation

as this in which he now found himself with the girl possible. No ordinary man would, with so weak a frame, have dared face such a venture.

To the girl he had been as thoughtful and as kind as a father. He lavished upon her a care and affection that seemed to find relief for whatever uneasiness of conscience he felt. Though Sorez realized that the Priest must know of his presence here and would spare no effort to get the image, he felt safe enough in this hut. With a few simple defenses Flores had made secret approach to the hut practically impossible. The cliff walls protected them from the rear, while approach from the front could be made only by the lake, save for short distances on either side. Across these spaces Flores had sprinkled dry twigs and so sensitive had his hearing become by his constant watchfulness that he would awake instantly upon the snapping of one of these. As a further precaution he placed his sheep at night within this enclosure, knowing that no one could approach without exciting them to a panic.

Moreover, Sorez suspected that the Priest had kept secret from the tribe his failure to recover the image after his long absence in pursuit of it. Not only was such a loss a reflection on his power, but it challenged the power of the Golden Man himself. Would the Sun God allow such a thing? Could the image be gone with no divine manifestations of its loss? Such questions were sure to be asked. The Priest had no men he could trust with a secret so important. He would work alone. The matter would end with a rifle

bullet or a stab in the dark — if it ended in favor of the Priest. With the vanishing of the treasure and the return of the image — if in favor of Sorez.

During the three days they had spent at the lake Jo had grown very serious and thoughtful. This seemed such a fairy world in which they were living that things took on new values. The two were seated around the fire with Flores and his wife in the shadows, when the girl spoke of new fears which had possessed her lately. Led on as much by what she herself saw and continued to see in the crystals, by the fascination she found in venturing into these new and strange countries, but above all by the domination of this stronger and older personality, she had until now followed without much sober thinking. If she hesitated, if she paused, he had only to tell of some rumor of a strange seaman in the city of Bogova or repeat one of the dozen wild tales current of Americans who had gone into the interior in search of gold and there been lost for years to turn up later sound and rich. He had hurried her half asleep from the house at Bogova and frightened her into silent obedience by suggesting that Wilson might by force take her back home when upon the eve of finding her father. She had looked again into the crystal and as always had seen him wandering among big hills in a region much like this. What did it all mean? She did not know, but now a deeper, more insistent longing was lessening the hold of the other. Her thoughts in the last few days had gone back more often than ever they had

to the younger man who had played, with such vivid, brilliant strokes, so important a part in her life. She felt, what was new to her, a growing need of him — a need based on nothing tangible and yet none the less eager. She turned to Sorez.

"I am almost getting discouraged," she said. "When shall we turn back?"

"Soon. Soon. Have you lost interest in the treasure altogether?"

"The treasure never mattered very much to me, did it? You have done your best to help me find my father, and for that I am willing to help you with this other thing. But I am beginning to think that neither of the quests is real."

She added impulsively:

"Twice I have left the most real thing in my life — once at home and once in Bogova. I shall not do it again."

"You refer to Wilson?"

"Yes. Here in the mountains — here with Flores and his wife, I am beginning to see."

"What, my girl?"

"That things of to-day are better worth than things of to-morrow."

Sorez shifted a bit uneasily. He had come to care a great deal for the girl — to find her occupying the place in his heart left empty by the death of the niece who lived in Boston. He was able less and less to consider her impersonally even in the furtherance of this project. He would have given one half the fortune he

expected, really to be able to help the girl to her father. He had lied — lied, taking advantage of this passionate devotion to entice her to the shores of this lake with her extraordinary gift of crystal-seeing. He was beginning to wonder if it were worth while. At any rate, he would be foolish not to reap the reward of his deceit at this point.

"Well," he concluded brusquely, "we must not get gloomy on the eve of victory. To-morrow the moon is full — do you think you will be strong enough to come with me to-morrow night to the shrine of the Golden Man?"

"Yes," she answered indifferently.

"He chose his own and surely he will not desert the agent of his choosing."

"No," answered the girl.

Her eyes rested a moment upon the silver lake before her and then upon the cliffs beyond. She had an odd desire this evening to get nearer to those walls of granite. A dozen times she had found her eyes turning to them and each time she obeyed the impulse it was followed by a new longing for David. She wished he were here with her now. She wished he was to be with her to-morrow night when Sorez took her out upon the lake with him. She did not mind gazing into the eyes of the image, of sinking under their spell, but now — this time — she would feel better if he were near her. She had a feeling as though he *were* somewhere near her — as though he were up there near the cliffs which she faced.

CHAPTER XXV

What the Stars Saw

THE moon shone broadly over a pool of purplish quicksilver. A ragged fringe of trees bordered it like a wreath. The waters were quiet — very, very quiet. They scarcely rippled the myriad stars which glittered back mockingly at those above. The air over and above it all was the thin air of the skies, not of the earth. It was as silent here as in the purple about the planets. Man seemed too coarse for so fine a setting. Even woman, nearest of all creatures to fairy stuff, must needs be at her best to make a fitting part of this.

From out of the shadows of this fringe of trees there stole silently another shadow. This moved slowly like a funeral barge away from the shore. As it came full into the radius of that silver light (a light matching the dead) it seemed more than ever one with sheeted things, for half prone upon this raft lay a girl whose cheeks were white against the background of her black hair and whose eyes saw nothing of the world about her. She stared more as the dead stare than the living, — stared into the shining eyes of the golden image which she held with rigid arms upon her knees, the image which had entangled so many lives. Her bosom moved rhythmically, slowly, show-

ing that she was not dead. The golden image stared back at her. Its eyes caught the moonbeams in its brilliant surfaces, so that it looked more a living thing than she who held it.

Facing them, standing bolt upright save when he stooped a trifle to reach forward with his paddle, was Sorez, who might have passed for Charon. His thin frame, his hollow cheeks, the intense look of his burning eyes gave him a ghostly air. The raft moved without a sound, scarcely rippling the waters before it, scarcely disturbing in its wake the gaunt shadow cast by Sorez, which followed them like a pursuing spectre. He studied keenly the dumb shores which lay in a broad circumference about them. He could see every yard of the lake and saw that they themselves were the only scar upon its mirror surface.

Peak upon peak looked down upon them, and higher, star upon star. Dead, indifferent things they were, chance accessories to this drama. They awaited the touch of sterner forces than those of man for their changes.

He who drove the raft along breathed as one who is trying hard to control himself in the face of a great emotion. His eyes continually shifted from the girl to the shores, then back again to the girl. In this way he reached a position near the middle of the lake. Here he paused.

He seemed to hesitate at the next step as though a great deal depended upon it. His lips moved, but he seemed afraid to break the silence. The girl remained

immovable, still staring into the glittering eyes of the image. He studied her eagerly as though he would read her mind before he spoke, for upon the first reply to his question depended the success or failure of all he had dared, of all he had undertaken. As she answered, either he would be the laughing stock of the world, or the most famous of modern adventurers; a comparatively poor man, or the richest in jewels of all the world. Suddenly he stooped and, bending close to the ear of the girl, said very distinctly:

"We are on the lake of Guadiva. It is said that here below the waters lies the shrine of the Golden One. You can see below the waters. Is — the shrine — here?"

Her lips moved uncertainly; an indistinct muttering followed. He held his breath in his excitement.

"The shrine — it is — it is below."

His color changed from gray to the red of youth; his eyes brightened, his whole body seemed to grow young with new strength. He asked the second question with feverish impatience,

"From here is it straight ahead, to the left, or the right?"

"Ahead and — and I can't see, I ——"

"Look deeper and you can see."

"To the right," she said decisively.

He dipped the paddle deep and put all his strength into the strokes. For a hundred yards the ripples broke in front of the clumsy craft. Again he stopped and asked the direction. Her lips trembled over the

words, exactly like those of one talking in sleep. It was always with an effort that she was able sufficiently to concentrate herself to give voice to what she saw. This time she bade him continue straight ahead. So he proceeded for another hundred yards. In this way he crossed to within an eighth of a mile of the opposite shore. Here she bade him pause, in answer to his questioning. He was not an emotional man, but he had never been under such a tension as during this manœuvering or felt such a variety of sensations.

"To the left," she muttered. And then almost querulously, "I can't find it. It is near here, but I do not see it."

She moved him almost in a circle, and still back and forth, back and forth without seeming able to locate the spot for which she sought. They were opposite two high cliffs which revealed a deep fissure between them. Now and again her head turned upwards to this spot and her face became troubled — the brows coming together in a puzzled scowl, which sometimes faded away into a look of fear. Once, with a startled cry, she put her hands up over her eyes and swayed back and forth with low moaning. He roused her from this by a sharp command, and she turned again to the lake with no trace of this disturbance. He began to get worried as she reached no definite spot. It was possible that she could not bring him to any smaller radius than this circle. This would leave a doubt so serious as after all to bring things to nothing. He stooped again.

"The altar — it is near here? We must find it — find it. Look deep — look in all directions — look without fear. You must find it — the altar of the Golden One with its treasure. You must find it."

But she only raised her head and fixed her staring eyes upon the dark cliffs. She looked as though she were listening very intently, — as to a cry from a distance of which she was not sure.

Her lips formed the word "David." He caught it and it startled him so that for a moment he followed her eyes, listening too. But beyond there was nothing but the sober height of barren rock standing stark against the sky. There was no movement below on the shore; there was no shadow upon the lake. Yet with eyes fixed upon this scene she still called the name, "David, David."

Sorez placed his hand upon her forehead. He concentrated the full power of his mind upon the quest.

"Below — below — you must look below, not above. You must see nothing but the altar of the Golden One. Below, deep, deep — look, search until you find it."

Her features became smooth once more and she obeyed the command. She said very distinctly this time.

"The altar is here."

"Below us?"

"Here."

He doubted — doubted even as the blood rushed through his veins with the gladness of her words. He doubted as one will to prolong the joy of the truth. But

there still remained much else to be learned. It was possible that the treasure was not so great as had been reported. If only she could see it lying there; if only she could tell him of the bars of yellow gold, of the glittering heaps of precious stones, of the jumbled pile of golden plate which had lain there for so long! The thought of it was enough to start the fever of desire. He wished even that he could force her to go down there and bring up to him a bit that he himself could touch and see and weigh. As he stood beside her with the lust of this thing in his eyes, a shadow detached itself from the shore. It may have been only the reflection of a tiny cloud. But there were no clouds. It may have been just a bit of driftwood. But it moved slowly and steadily towards the raft.

Sorez bent above the girl again.

"The Golden Man will tell you. Look into his eyes very hard."

The girl grasped the image more tightly and obeyed.

"Now go below, deep — deep."

For some reason, even as she had done in the room when first she had held this thing, she drew back in fear at this.

"No! No!" she pleaded.

But Sorez had lost sight of her as a personality now; she was nothing but a means to this one end; nothing but an adjunct to this heathen idol. He repeated his command more decisively — more sternly. His words were sharp — cold.

The shadow which had left the shore still came nearer — silently, swiftly.

The girl rested her frightened eyes upon the brilliant jewels set below the ugly, squat brow. They glowed in answer. They sparkled like tiny fires. Her face grew strained — her breathing became more rapid.

"Deeper — deeper!"

The shadow had come very near. Had the girl not been looking so intently into the crystal eyes, she could have seen — could have warned. The moon now showed it to be a canoe and in the canoe a man. The man was very lean and his uncovered head was close shaven. His eyes were very like those in the image.

The girl shuddered.

"Deeper — deeper!" came the relentless command.

Her voice came back muffled — as though from a distance.

"It is dark — dark."

She began to gasp. Then suddenly she placed her hand to her head.

"I see no gold — I see no gold!"

Sorez sank to his knees before the girl. His face was chalk white.

"Gone? Is it gone?"

The shadow was now beside the raft. The shadow was now behind Sorez. The shadow placed one foot upon the raft, but it paused there a moment at the cry which brought Sorez also to attention.

"Father!" screamed the girl. "Father!"

Sorez stared straight ahead of him in a frenzy. Then the shadow sprang, throwing his arms about the tall figure. Without a cry Sorez sank under him. He made a brief struggle but he was too weak to overcome the demon strength of the man who bore him down. With remarkable dexterity, the Priest bound him hand and foot before he had recovered fully from the shock of the fall.

The girl was now murmuring to herself, murmuring the one word "Father." It was an appealing, frightened cry, full of doubt, uncertainty, and yet of hungry love. For a second it held the attention of both men, the Priest taking a step nearer the girl and looking at her almost curiously.

Sorez knew this was the end. But he was a good gambler; having lost all, he accepted his fate with stoicism. He kept his head clear — clear enough to do the thing which marked him a man. He squirmed about until he faced the girl. With every ounce of strength in him, he shouted his final command to her.

"Awake! Awake!"

The girl stirred uneasily. The Priest reached for his knife, not understanding.

"Awake!" repeated Sorez, and his voice quivered with the intensity of his earnestness. "Awake!"

The girl trembled and seemed to fight her way to consciousness as one after a deep dive struggles to the top. She gasped for breath. Her eyes fluttered open, closed, fluttered open again. She roused herself to a sitting posture and the image dropped from her lap.

The Priest snatched it up as the girl shrank back from him. For a moment the two stared at each other. The Priest was held motionless. Then as Sorez hitched a bit to one side, he turned to his work.

Sorez hoped for nothing but a swift end. The cruel face of the other left nothing to question, nothing else to hope. But now that the girl had shaken off the influence of the image he was easier. There was but one thing left to try, even though the eyes looking down into his hinted at nothing of mercy; he must save the girl if possible.

As the Priest bent over him, he found his voice.

"Listen to me a moment. I have nothing to ask for myself, I took my chances and I lost. But the girl here — she is innocent of even wishing for your treasure."

"Why then is she here?"

"I brought her here."

"You could not — against her will."

Sorez moistened his lips and explained: "She came on another mission. She came in search of a father who has been long missing."

"To this lake — to this spot — with the image in her lap?"

"No — this part of it is at my prompting. She but obeyed me."

The Priest turned away impatiently. He saw the girl crouching in terror of him. He moved nearer. He saw her black eyes. They remained on his strangely immovable. He felt something of a tremor. Things

Sorez stared straight ahead of him in a frenzy. Then the shadow sprang, throwing his arms about the tall figure.

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about him became blurred for a moment. He shook himself free.

"I have heard too many stories," he said.

"But, good God! you believe this," burst out Sorez. "You have n't the heart to revenge yourself upon her? You ——"

He checked himself. He knew the man would do as he most feared. This, then, was to be his punishment — to know that he had brought the girl to such an end as this — that he had won her trust and confidence and rewarded it with such torture as this demon might mete out to her. The Priest might even slay her before his eyes. He strained at the rope which bound him until it tore into his flesh. The waters played about the raft. The stars danced in the ripples.

Sorez brought himself to try once more.

"If you have a spark of pity in your heart, you will do her no harm. Listen! I lied to the girl. I brought her here on the hope that she might find this father who has been a long time gone from home. He was a sea captain and I told her that many captains had been lost here in the mountains and been found again. I told her that I had seen her father in Bogova. That is why she came."

"To the lake?"

Sorez had but a second in which to decide. If he told the Priest of the girl's power, the latter might slay her to bury the secret, or torture her to betray it to him. No, it would be safer to leave the Priest merely suspicious.

"As I am about to die," affirmed Sorez, solemnly, "that is God's truth."

The Priest placed the little golden idol out of danger. Then he stooped and bound the ropes more tightly about the ankles of the prostrate man. Sorez watched him with new interest — almost with a new hope. He glanced at the girl and saw her kneeling upon the raft, her white face to the moon.

The Priest bent to fasten the rope which already bit into the flesh above the arms. It was for this Sorez had prayed. As the Priest stooped, his long coat swayed within reach of the long-waiting fingers. Sorez gripped both laps and that grip was the grip of death.

Before the Priest understood the situation, Sorez had bent his bound legs double beneath him and, gripping the tightly bound straw with his heels, shoved with all his strength towards the edge of the raft. The Priest fell atop of him, but instantly tore himself back. The fingers held. Once again Sorez hitched forward and once again the Priest came with him. In a panic the crazed Priest bore his knees down upon the prostrate man and then swung off to one side. But the fingers held. Sorez was now lying with his head half over the edge. The silver waters lipped his gray hair. He raised his legs once more—just once more, and shoved.

He gained an inch. Then in a flash the Priest managed to stand up with Sorez still clinging. But only for a moment, when he fell backwards, striking the back of his head sharply upon the logs. The girl screamed in fright. The Priest saw the world swim

before his eyes, and the next second looked up to find a woman — his own daughter — his Jo — looking back at him! But Sorez still clung and still shoved with his legs towards the edge of the boat.

"For God's sake — what are you about?" gasped he who a moment gone had been the Priest.

Sorez saw nothing of the change. He was busy bending up his legs, digging in his heels, and shoving.

"Father! Father!"

Sorez had heard the cry before. He felt the girl beating at him with her white hands. The raft was beginning to settle. In the heavy fall of the two men a section had been loosened so that now it might possibly hold two of them — no more. The girl realized this; the man realized this. Sorez knew nothing save his determination to drag the Priest to the bottom with him.

"Let him go!" shouted the girl. "Let him go! He is my father! Can't you hear?"

The words penetrated just as he was about to shove once more.

"Your father?"

"Quick! We are sinking!"

He let go. The Priest sprang to his feet. The canoe had gone and the loosely constructed raft was settling as timber after timber freed itself. Sorez, himself again, saw this. Without a word he shoved once more, — this time himself alone. He went down and the raft floated. He had kept his word after all; he had given the girl her father.

CHAPTER XXVI

A Lucky Bad Shot

AS soon as they recovered sufficient strength to desire anything more of life than rest for their bruised and weary bodies, Wilson assumed command of the situation. He saw nothing but a straight path to the girl.

"We must get down to the lake," he said firmly. "Get down there and find Sorez. If the natives are up in arms, I want to be near the girl. I 'm going to take her out of here. If the others refuse to join us, we 'll take her alone and make a dash for it."

"We oughter get our provisions first," suggested Stubbs.

"No — what strength we have left is for her."

"We 'll have twice as much with grub."

"And we 'll have less time."

Wilson's jaw was set. To go down the mountain and back would take at least four hours and leave them even nearer dead than they were at present. Aside from that, the desire to see the girl had become an obsession. He was no longer amenable to reason. He felt the power to dominate. In the last two days

he had learned that there are at least two essential things in life — two things a man has a right to take where he finds them — love and water. The two lay at his feet now and he would wait no longer. His heart burned with as hot a thirst as his throat. Neither Sorez nor gold nor all the brown men in the universe should balk him of them longer.

Leaning forward he gripped the arm of his comrade with a strength the latter had not thought within him.

"Old man," he said with a new ring in his voice, "you must follow me the rest of this journey. I 've got down to one thing now — just one thing. I 'm going to find this girl — I 'm going to take her into these two arms — and I 'm going to carry her out of here and never let her go. Do you understand? And there is n't gold enough, nor men enough, nor heathen images enough in the world to stop me now. We 're going back, Stubbs — the girl and I — we 're going back, and God help those who get in our way."

At first Stubbs thought this was the fever, but as he looked at the tense face, the locked jaw, the burning eyes, he saw it was only a man in earnest. Some spark within his own breast warmed to life before this passion. He put out his hand.

"An' I signs with you right here."

"I 've turned aside for things all I 'm going to," ran on Wilson, excitedly. "Now I 'm going over them. I 'm going straight — I 'm going hard — and I 'm not going to turn my back on her again for a

second. Do you understand, Stubbs? She 's mine and I 'm going to take her."

"You won't have to take her, if you feel that way," answered Stubbs.

"What d' you mean?"

"She 'll go, boy — she 'll go through Hell with you with thet look in your eyes."

"Then come on," shouted Wilson, with quite unnecessary fierceness. "I 'm going to pull out of this heathen web."

The two men rose to their tired feet, every muscle protesting, and before dark Stubbs learned how little the body counts, how little anything counts, before the will of a man who has focused the might of his soul upon a single thing. They moved down ever towards the blue lake which blinked back at the sun like a blue-eyed babe. Their rifles pressed upon their shoulders like bars of lead; their heavy feet were numb; their eyes bulged from their heads with the strain of keeping them open. Of the long, bitter struggle, it is enough to say that it was a sheer victory over the impossible. Each mile was a blank, yet they pressed forward, Wilson ever in the lead, Stubbs ever plodding behind. It was almost as though they were automatons galvanized by some higher intelligence, for their own had become numbed save to the necessity of still dragging their feet ahead. In this way they reached the shores of the lake; in this way they circled it; in this way they neared the hut of Flores. Stumbling along the trail, guided by some instinct, Wilson raised his head

at the sight of two figures sitting in the sun by the door of the hut; one was the girl, he saw that clearly enough, for to his own vision it was as the sun breaking through low-hanging clouds; but the other — he motioned Stubbs to halt. The two had made no noise, coming up through the undergrowth from the lake, and were now able to conceal themselves partly behind a sort of high bush. Had those in the hut been alert, the two could not have escaped detection, but so intent they seemed upon their conversation that a dozen men might have approached. Wilson tried to control himself; he wished to make sure. Steadying himself by a grip upon the shoulder of Stubbs, he looked again. Then bending close to his comrade's ear, he asked him — waiting without drawing breath for reply, —

"Who is it?"

The answer came charged with bitterness,

"The Priest!"

Wilson lowered his rifle. The Priest was sitting some two feet from the girl, against the hut, his head thrown back as though he were trying hard to think. Wilson was a good shot; he had as a boy amused himself by the hour with his small, twenty-two caliber rifle. At this moment, however, his sight was none of the best and his hand anything but steady. Stubbs signaled him to let him try the shot, but Wilson would not trust him. He had no doubt but that the Priest had killed Sorez and was now holding the girl a prisoner, perhaps even anticipating her death. It was

his duty, his privilege, to set her free. He fitted the stock of the weapon into his armpit, and raised the barrel. His hand was weak; the gun trembled so that he dared not shoot. Stubbs saw this and, stepping in front of him, motioned him to rest the barrel on his shoulder. With this support he found his aim steadier. He purposely gave a bit of a margin to the right, so that in case of any deflection the error would be away from the girl. He pulled the trigger.

When the wisp of smoke cleared away, Wilson saw that both figures were upon their feet — the girl in the arms of the priest who held her close to him as though to protect her. Their eyes were upon him. The girl stared in terror, then in surprise, and now, struggling free, stood as though looking at an apparition.

Wilson understood nothing of this. His brain was now too slow working to master fresh details. He still grasped nothing but the fact that the girl was there and by her side the man who had proved himself a mortal enemy. He raised his weapon once more.

With a scream the girl ran straight ahead towards him, in line with the astonished man by the hut. As she ran she called,

"David! David! David!"

He heard the call and, dropping the rifle, staggered towards her. He held out his arms to her and she checked her steps, studying his eyes as though to make sure he was sane. He stood motionless but there was a prayer in his silent lips, in his eyes, in his out-

stretched arms. She took another little step towards him, then, without further hesitation, came to his side and placed her head upon his shoulder. He folded his arms over her heaving shoulders — he rested his cheek upon her black hair — he whispered her name again and again.

So they stood, Stubbs and the Priest both staring at them as at the central figures upon the stage, until she raised her head to look once more into his eyes. He saw her lips within a few inches of his own, but he dared not kiss them yet. It was odd — he had never in his life spoken an audible word of love to her — had never written of love to her — and yet he knew that she knew all that had been unsaid, even as he did. There had never been need of words with them. Love had been developed in the consciousness of each in silence and in loneliness, but had moved to this climax as surely and as inevitably as though foreordained. He had but to look down into her eyes now and all was said; she had but to look into his, even deadened as they were by fatigue, to read all her heart craved. Her breath came in little gasps.

"David — David, you have come for me again!"

"For the last time," he answered.

"You are never going to let me go again, are you, David?"

"Never," he answered fiercely.

"Ah! hold me tight, David."

He drew her more firmly to him.

"Tighter! Tighter!" she whispered.

He crushed her against his pounding heart. He ached with the joy of it. But with the relief from the heavy burden of fear which had for so long weighed him down, nature asserted herself and forced down his leaden eyelids. She felt him sinking in her arms and freed herself. With her hands upon his shoulders she drew back and looked hungrily at him. His sandy hair was tangled and frowsy, his eyes shot with tiny threads of red, his cheeks bronzed and covered with a shaggy light beard. His clothes were tattered, and about his waist there dangled a circle of leather bags. He was an odd enough looking figure. By some strange chance she had never seen him in other than some uncouth garb; drenched with rain, draped in an Oriental lounging robe, with a cartridge belt about his waist, and covered with sweat and powder grime, and now in this.

Both were brought back to the world about them by a shot from Stubbs. He had fired at the Priest and missed. It was as though the man led a charmed life. The girl raised her hand as Stubbs was about to fire again.

"Don't! Don't! You are making a terrible mistake. This is n't the Priest — he is my father."

The phrase awoke even the sleeping sense of these men.

"Your father!" exclaimed Wilson.

But the man was coming towards them — steadily, and yet as if in a sort of daze.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

The eyes, the high cheek-bones, the thin lips, were those of the Priest, but the voice was different. It had lost something of its harshness — something, too, of its decisiveness. The girl interrupted,

"This is no time for explanations. Come into the hut. We must rest first."

She led the way, keeping a tight grip upon Wilson's arm, steadying him. Stubbs and he whom they had known as the Priest followed.

Within the hut Flores and his wife, still bewildered by the sudden conversion of the Priest from an enemy to a friend (understanding nothing of what had happened), crouched far into the rear overcome with genuine awe and reverence for the guardian of their god in his new character. Threats had driven them to rebellion while kindliness now made of them abject slaves. They stood ready to obey his slightest wish — not with cravenness, but with quick reversion to the faith of their ancestors. But he acted as though he did not see them — as though, in fact, he saw nothing of anything about him save the girl. He followed her with his eyes with almost childlike eagerness and greeted a glance from her with almost pathetic joy. He spoke little, apparently finding difficulty in expressing himself — in forming his scattered thoughts into correct sentences. His whole appearance was that of a man freed after a long imprisonment. The only thing of his present surroundings which he now grasped perfectly was his relationship with the girl. He was reviving old-time joys in his daughter.

But Jo herself, even in the freshness of her happiness over the unexpected success of her long journey, had found an even greater interest in this newer passion. She spread a blanket for Wilson in a corner of the hut and forced him to lie down here and give himself up to sleep. Stubbs sank to the ground in the sun where he stood outside and fell into a stupor.

Hour after hour the girl sat at Wilson's side as though guarding his rest, and in this gentle task she found a new conception of happiness. Near her, during the long vigil, sat her father, while in and out, softly as two shadows, moved Flores and his wife.

Wilson awoke long before Stubbs and insisted upon getting up. There were many things to be learned and many things to be done. He realized that they were still in the heart of a hostile country and that if they were to get out safely, time could not be wasted in sleep. What part this man whom he still thought of as the Priest would play, he had no idea.

The girl told him as much of the odd story as she had gathered, beginning with her own arrival in the hut. Manning's memory dated from the blow on the raft. Back of this he skipped an interval of fifteen years. Even there his memory was cloudy. He recalled vaguely having joined an expedition which had for its object prospecting in these mountains, but who the others of the party were he did not know. He remembered hazily the trip over the mountains and a battle with a party of natives. He was injured and

after this was sick a long while. As far as he was concerned he had been unconscious ever since that time. Of his recovery, of the strange sequence of events which caused him to take up a life among the Chibcas, who elevated him finally into the position of high priest, of the fanatical devotion to his trust which had driven him across the continent and then across an ocean to recover the image, he recalled nothing. He did not know of the existence of an idol or of any superstition in connection with it.

Wilson, listening, marveled, but he quickly associated this with similar cases of dual identity brought about by brain trouble following an accident to the skull. The psychology of the case, however, did not at present so much interest him as the possible consequences to them all which might follow this dénouement. It instantly occurred to him that it was doubtful if Manning in his present condition was anything but an added menace to the party. A half hour's questioning convinced Wilson that it was literally true that the last fifteen years were a blank to the man and that his mental condition at present was scarcely superior to that of a child. Consequently, in the event of an attack by the aroused natives either Manning would be thought to have been captured by the party, which would bring down swift vengeance, or he would be thought to have deserted them, which was equally sure to bring about the annihilation of them all. The only thing to do seemed to be to keep the man out of sight as much as possible on the journey and in the event of

trouble to hide him altogether. It seemed to him wisest not to allow them to rest even that night but to push on. Flores, eager to do anything for the Priest, agreed to guide them. He aroused Stubbs, and after a good meal the party started and without incident made eight miles before they stopped.

They found a good camping place — a sort of crude cave near a brook and just off the trail. They built a fire and cooked a portion of the leg of mutton which Flores had brought for them before returning. So far they had not caught a glimpse of a native. This fact and the excitement of actually being upon the home path banished them completely from their minds. But that night both men agreed that each had better take his turn at watching.

"I 'll take the first watch," insisted Wilson to Stubbs. "I would n't trust you to wake me up."

With a good-natured grin Stubbs submitted and threw his tired body on the turf, making a pillow of the bags of jewels. He slept as heartily as though snug in the bunk of a safe ship. But both the girl and her father refused to take Wilson's advice and do likewise. Both insisted upon sharing his watch with him. The father sat on the other side of his daughter staring, as though still wondering, into the shadows of the silent wood kingdom about him. He spoke but little and seemed to be still trying to clear his thoughts.

At their backs rose the towering summits which still stood between them and the ocean; above those the stars which from the first had seemed to watch their

lives; before them the heavy, silent shadows which bade them be ever alert.

Wilson sat upright with his rifle over his knees. The girl nestled against his shoulder. All was well with the world.

CHAPTER XXVII

Dangerous Shadows

IN the narration of what had befallen her while in the care of Sorez, Wilson came to have a new conception of the man. With the exception of the fact that Sorez had considered his own interest alone in bringing the girl down here, and that he had lured her on by what he knew to be a deliberate lie, Sorez had been as kind and as thoughtful of her as her own father could have been. After their imprisonment in Bogova and while in hiding from Wilson he had supplied the girl with the best of nurses and physicians. Furthermore, in order to make what recompense he could to her in case of an accident to him or in the event of the failure of their mission, he had, before leaving Bogova, made his will, bequeathing to her every cent of his real and personal property. The chief item of this was the house in Boston which he had purchased as a home for himself and niece, a few months before the latter's death. In addition to this he had in the end made the supreme sacrifice — he had given his life.

Sitting there in the starlight she told Wilson these *things*, with a sob in her voice.

"And so he kept his word after all — did n't he? He brought me to him."

The older man by her side looked up at her.

"My daughter," he murmured. "My daughter."

She placed her arm over his shoulder scarcely able to believe the good fortune which had at once placed her here between her father and her lover.

"The golden idol did some good after all," she whispered.

"The idol?" asked her father. "What idol?"

"You remember nothing of an image?" broke in Wilson.

"An image? An idol? I have seen them. I have seen them, but — but I can't remember where."

He spoke with a sort of childlike, apologetic whine. Wilson hesitated a moment. He had brought the idol with him after finding it in the hut where Manning had carried it from the raft — apparently unconsciously — and had taken it, fearing to leave it with Flores. He had intended to throw it away in the mountains in some inaccessible place where it could never again curse human lives. This image ought to be final proof as to whether or not Manning could recall anything of his life as a priest of the Sun God or not. If the sight of this failed to arouse his dead memory, then nothing ever could. Of all the things in this life among these mountains no one thing had ever figured so prominently or so vitally in his life as this. About this had centered all his fanatical worship — all his power.

As Wilson rose to get the image from where he had hidden it near Stubbs, the girl seized his arm and, bending far forward, gasped:

"The shadow — did you see it?"

Wilson turned with his weapon cocked.

"Where?" he demanded.

But underneath the trees where she had thought she saw a movement all was quiet again — all was silent. With a laugh at her fears, Wilson secured the image and brought it back. He thrust it towards Manning. It was clearly visible in the moonlight. The girl shrank a little away from it.

"Ugh!" she shuddered. "I don't like to look at it to-night."

In the dull silver light it appeared heavier and more somber than in the firelight. It still sat cross-legged with the same cynical smile about its cruel mouth, the same bestial expression about the brow, the same low-burning fires in the spider-like eyes. As Wilson and her father bent over it she turned away her head. Once again she seized Wilson's arm and bade him look beyond the thicket in front of them.

"I saw something move. I am sure of it."

"You are a bit nervous, I 'm afraid," he said tenderly. "If only you would lie down for the rest of the night."

"No, no, David. I am sure this time."

"Only a shadow. There is a light breeze."

"I could n't see anything but — it did n't *feel* like a shadow, David."

"You felt it? Has the image ——" he asked a bit anxiously.

"No — oh, I can't make you understand, but I 'm sure something moved in the bushes."

"Stay close to me then," he laughed quietly.

He turned back to Manning who was turning the image over and over in his hands with indifferent interest. To him it was nothing more than a curio — a metal doll. But when he caught the glint of a moonbeam on the jeweled eyes, he bent over it with keener concern. He raised it in his hands and stared steadily back into the cold eyes. This stare soon became fixed and Manning began to grow slightly rigid. Wilson snatched the object from his hands. For a moment the man remained immovable; then he rubbed his hand over his brow, muttering incoherently to himself. This nervous symptom disappeared and Manning apparently instantly forgot the idol again. He called for his daughter. She came closer to his side and he rested his head against her shoulder.

"Dear father," she murmured affectionately.

"I — I can't think," he said.

"Don't try, Daddy. Wait until we get out of here and you are all well again."

"If I could reach my ship," he muttered.

"What ship, Daddy?"

"Why, my own — the 'Jo Manning.'"

That took her back to the time she was a very little girl. She remembered now that he had named the ship after her, — the last ship which he had sailed out

of Newburyport. Poor old daddy! What a different man he was this moment from him who had held her in his arms and kissed her with tears rolling down his bronzed cheeks. It wrenched her heart to watch him sitting there so listlessly — so weakly — so little himself. The fear was growing in her heart that he never would be the same again. Almost — almost it was better to remember him as he was then than to know him as he sat there now. Had it not been for the comfort, for the joy of another order, for the safety she felt in this younger man by her side, her heart would have broken at the sight. If only she could have found him during those few days he was in Boston — when the crystals had first shown him to her — when he must have passed within a few feet of her, it might not then have been so difficult to rouse him. But at that time he would not have known his own.

A bedlam of raucous, clamorous shrieks settling into a crude sort of war cry brought all four of them to their feet. Wilson thrust the girl back of him towards the cave-like formation behind them. This effectually protected them in the rear and partly from two sides. Stubbs swept the bags of jewels into his arms and carried them to one corner of this natural excavation. Then he took his position by the side of Wilson and Manning, who was unarmed. The three waited the approach of the unseen demons. Not a light, not the glint of a weapon could be seen. But before their eyes, in and out among the trees making up the dense growth, shadows flitted back and

forth in a sort of ghost dance. In addition to the hoarse shouting, the air was rent from time to time by the sound of a blast as from a large horn.

The effect of this upon Manning, who had been thrust behind them by Wilson, was peculiar. At each blast he threw back his head and sniffed at the air as a war horse does at sound of the bugle. His eyes brightened, his lean frame quivered with emotion, his hands closed into tight knots. The girl, observing this, crept closer to him in alarm. She seized his arm and called to him, but he made no response.

"Father! Father!" she shouted above the din.

He started forward a pace, but she drew him back. Seeing her he came to himself again for a moment. She scarcely knew him; the old look of intensity which strained almost every feature out of the normal had transformed him. He stood now as it were between two personalities. He partially realized this, for he stepped forward behind Wilson and shouted:

"They come! They come! I — I think I can stop them — for a little. If — if I do, don't delay — don't wait for me."

Wilson thought he rambled.

"Do you hear? Quick — tell me?"

"Yes," shouted Wilson.

The din seemed to be approaching in an ever-narrowing circle. It came from all sides — a noise so deafening, so full of unusual sounds that it was in itself terrifying. Again came the blast, followed by another and another. Manning caught sight of the

image upon the ground. It acted like magic. He snatched it up. But the girl, regardless of danger, ran to his side.

"Don't," she cried in a panic. "What is the matter, father?"

He looked down at her with eyes which scarcely reflected any recognition.

"Don't go, father. Don't you know me? Don't you know your daughter? See, I am Jo — Jo! Do you understand?"

Even in the midst of this other danger — the noise and imminent peril, the two men heard and turned away their heads at the sight with throats straining with emotion. Manning looked back with hardly a gleam of his true self showing in his eyes. And yet there was something left which made him pause — which in one flash brought him back for a second. He stooped and kissed her. Then he raised himself and facing the two men pointed towards the woods behind them.

"Go," he commanded.

Another blast and he clutched the idol to his breast. He raised his eyes to the East and the three stood dumbfounded — from his throat there issued a cry so wild, so weird, that it checked their breathing. Instantly following there was silence from the shadows. One, two, three, four seconds passed — still that silence which was nerve-racking in its intensity. Then a cry rang out from among the trees so piercing that the girl put her arm up over her eyes as though to ward off a

blow. A hundred forms appeared from the trees. Stubbs and Wilson raised their rifles. But with a sweeping motion back with his hand, the Priest bade the two men pause. He disappeared into the shadows where he was greeted with a sort of pæan of joy. Then silence. Then a few sharp-spoken words. Then silence again.

Wilson, scarcely believing this was not some evil dream, gripped Stubbs' arm.

"Come," he gasped. "Let 's get out. This — this is hell."

He took the half-swooning girl in his arms.

"Get a grip on yourself, Jo — just for a little. We must go — at once."

"But Daddy — Daddy ——"

Wilson closed his eyes as though to shut out the sight he had last seen when looking into the face of that man.

"It is better — as it is."

Stubbs, still with a care for the jewels, helped Wilson on with his belt and fastened his own into place. He had had a good rest and felt comparatively fresh, but the others tottered as they walked.

Into the dark among the trees they went, following the faint trail which led towards the big mountains which were still a barrier, — on — on — on until the girl dropped in her tracks from exhaustion and Wilson beside her.

For six hours Stubbs maintained a grim watch over the two, his rifle across his knees, hoping against hope

for one bit of good luck more — that if so be there was another attack, he might have at least one fair shot at the Priest. Whether the man was the girl's father or not (and he privately doubted the story) he felt that this was the only thing which would ever take from his mouth the taste of rope.

But he was disappointed. The morning broke fair and peaceful with, so far as they could see, the birds and squirrels the only occupants of this forest besides themselves. In fact, the next three days save for the strain of being constantly alert were a sort of idyl for Wilson and Jo. They had little difficulty in shooting sufficient food for their needs, and water was plentiful. The trail led through a fair land gay, at this time of year, with many flowers.

The girl, to be sure, sobbed at first a good deal in the dark but the two men knew nothing of this. Soon, after the first acute pain of the personal loss, she was able to reason a little with herself. It seemed to her then, remembering how much a child he was when with her and how strong and powerful he looked as he stepped into the woods, that perhaps, after all, he would be happier with his many children than with her. Then always there was the opportunity of coming back to him, — coming under better auspices and with better opportunities for really bringing him to his own. It was this last thought that finally brought her real consolation.

"Perhaps," she said to Wilson, hesitating a trifle in fear that he might not approve of the suggestion,

"perhaps some day we can come back here to him, David."

"I had thought of it, dear. He saved our lives; if he had remained, not one of us would have got out of here. That in itself is enough to make us everlastingly beholden to him. But —" he paused, "I think, dear heart, that it is kinder to let him remain even among heathen people a strong man with power, than to bring him back, a child, to die."

"He chose for himself, David."

"Yes — and was able to realize and be glad that he had been given another chance to do for his daughter."

The girl thought a moment. Then her face brightened.

"That — that alone makes the trip worth while."

"That — and this," he answered, drawing her to his side.

"Yes," she whispered, "and in a way he gave me you — he gave me you."

CHAPTER XXVIII

A Dash for Port

THE Queen of Carlina, after a restless night, rose one fair morning early in October and dressed herself long before the appearance of her maids. There had been much to disturb her sleep, rumor upon rumor and arrest after arrest during the last few days, and last night a long conference with her advisers. Before she retired she had turned wearily to Otaballo, who remained a few minutes after the others departed.

"My General," she said, "I 'm tired of it all. Let them do as they will."

"Not so long as there is a loyal man to carry a gun," he answered stubbornly.

"You are old, General; it is time you had peace."

"I am as young as my queen."

"She is very old to-night," she answered, with a weary smile. "I fear I am not a real queen, — just a woman. And women grow old quickly — without love."

The General bit his moustache. He had long seen that it was more this than the plotting of the Revolutionists which was undermining his power. He did not know how to answer.

"You have the love of your people."

"Not even that. The sentiment of love for their queen is dead. That is the root of the whole matter. There is but one thing, then, for me to do: to retire gracefully — to anticipate their wishes — to listen to their cry and declare a republic. Then you and I will go back to the cottage together and drink our tea in peace."

"You are wrong. That is not the wish of the people; it is the wish only of a few hundred blackguards led on by those devils brought here from over the sea."

"You mean Dick's men?"

"The devil's men. If you give me authority, I 'll have every mother's son of them shot before morning."

She shook her head.

"Not even to please my bloodthirsty general. They have played us false but — still they are countrymen of his."

"You insult him. They belong to no country."

"Why," she asked thoughtfully, "why should I expect them to fight for me? Perhaps they think I played Dicky false. They have reason — he is not here where he won his right to be."

"Then for the love of God, bring him here," he answered, forgetting himself. She started at that.

"No! No!" she cried hastily, as though fearing he might make the attempt to find him; "not to save the kingdom. You should listen to me to-night, General; I am very wise. The reports which have come in are

without exception bad. You arrest here, you arrest there, but still the people gather and still they state their wishes. I know how it is; at first they were amused to have their queen, — it was like a holiday. Especially when Dicky talked to them. But freedom is in the blood and it is as foolish to fight against it as against the foreign ships we once tried to keep out of our harbor. Carlina — the old Carlina, your Carlina and mine, is no more."

She paused at the look of horror which had crept over his withered face. She dropped her hand to his arm.

"Do I sound disloyal? It is only because the kingdom remains as it used to be in your dear heart and yours alone. I am your queen, General, because you are still in the past. But the others are not. They are of the present and to them I am only a tradition. If they were all like you, my heart and soul, my life and love would all be theirs. It is to save what is left of the former things — to save you and the few others of that old kingdom — to have our dear Carlina as we used to have it out there in the sunshine of the garden — that I would leave this turmoil before it is too late."

The white head drooped as she spoke, — drooped low over the wrinkled hands clasped upon the jeweled sword handle. Dreams — dreams that had seemed about to come true in these his later years now faded before his misty eyes. He had thought to see, before he died, the glory of the former times returned; and now his queen was the first to call them dead. For the moment he felt himself as solitary as one returned from

the grave. But, as she had said, if there were more like Otaballo, the kingdom would still be, without all this strife. His stubborn thoughts refused to match into the present. He raised his head again, still a general of Carlina.

"Your Majesty," he said, "there is but one way in which a servant of the house of Montferaldo may save himself."

And clicking his heels together, he had turned with military precision and left her. Then she had tossed the night long, dreaming horrible things. Now she sat in her private apartments staring with troubled eyes over the sunlit grounds. So an hour passed, when without warning, the door snapped open, closed, and she looked up, startled, to see Danbury himself.

Her breath was cut off as though her heart had been stopped, as when one thrusts in a finger and halts a clock. There was the same dead silence that closes in upon the cessation of the long-continued ticking — a silence as though the whole world paused a moment to listen. He limped across the room to her side. She saw that his hair was dishevelled, his coat torn, as though he had been in a struggle. Then his arms closed about her and she felt a great sense of safety, of relief, as though everything had suddenly been settled for her. There was no kingdom, no throne, no Otaballo, no city-ful of malcontents, — nothing but Dicky. She felt as much at peace as when they used to sit in the garden together. All this other confusion had been only some

story which he had told her. But in a minute he drew back from her and thrust the present in again.

"Come," he whispered, "we must hurry."

"But Dicky — what is it?"

"The city is up in arms. We have n't a second to spare."

"And Otaballo — my general?"

He clenched his fists at the memory.

"Dead. They killed him and a handful of men at his side."

"Dead — my general dead?"

"Like the brave general he was."

She put her hands to her face. He drew her to his shoulder where he let her weep a moment, his own throat big.

"Oh, but they shall answer for it!" he cried. "Hush, dear. I 'm coming back with a thousand men and make 'em sweat for that."

His quick senses caught a sound without.

"Come," he commanded, "we shall be cut off here." He took her arm and hurried her along. They scurried down the stairs and across the palace grounds to a small gate in the rear. Here a carriage was waiting for them. Danbury helped her in and stooped to kiss her lips before he jumped up beside the driver.

"Now drive for your life!" he commanded.

The whip fell across the quivering flanks of the nervous animals and they leaped forward. The driver kept to the deserted side streets where they raced along unchallenged, but soon it became necessary to turn into

the main thoroughfare in order to reach the water front and the boat. In the four minutes it would require to go those dozen blocks their fate would be decided. If the army had not yet advanced that far, they would be safe; otherwise he must depend upon a dash for it, covering the mob with the two revolvers he had. Eight shots to ward off the attack of a thousand men!

Danbury leaned far out over the box as the horses took the turn at a speed which almost swung the rear wheels clear of the ground. The animals had become panic-stricken now and were bolting madly ahead like horses from a burning stable.

But though the road looked clear they had not advanced a block before men sprang up as though from the ground. The populace had heard of the advancing column and such as had not already joined it prepared to meet it here. In order to avoid immediate suspicion, they were forced to steady the horses down to something like a walk. To Danbury it seemed as though they had stopped stock-still. He was not a good man in such a position as this; he was all for dashing action. He could hardly sit still. They received many side glances from the excited groups, but they passed merely as a carriage full of nervous foreigners. Danbury himself was not recognized. So they crept along and Danbury gained hope, until they were within two hundred yards of the turn which would take them out of the line of march. Then with hoarse shouting, the advance line of the revolutionists swept around a corner and directly towards them.

They were a yelling horde of half-drunken maniacs, — a disordered horde eager for the noisy excitement their Southern blood craved. With half of them it was more the frenzied love of flags and noise that had brought them out than any deep-seated conviction of right. But the thing that brought Danbury to attention was the sight of Splinter with forty of his fellows from the boat leading the crowd. In an instant he was off the box and inside the carriage. He realized what it would mean to be recognized by him. He had but one thought — to guard the safety of her within.

The driver advanced at a walk, keeping as close as possible to the curbing. There was just one chance in a thousand that the crowd might be too intent upon their goal to bother with passing vehicles. They were not after the Queen herself, for they looked upon her as a mere girl influenced by Otaballo. Should they chance upon her, undoubtedly they would feel obliged to arrest her, but she was not at the moment of such supreme importance as to make them alert to prevent her escape. Danbury knew this. The danger lay in the impudent curiosity of some one of the soldiers. Each felt the license of the law breaker. It was the spirit that led them to destroy property for the sheer joy of destroying that he had to fear. He held his weapon ready, sitting far back. The girl was white and calm. They watched the first few stragglers pass in dead silence; they heard the clattering confusion yet to pass.

Then a soldier thrust his musket through the glass

with a coarse laugh. He peered within, but the girl's face was shielded so that the most he saw was that she was a girl. The muzzle of Danbury's revolver was within a foot of his head and a finger trembled upon the hair trigger. Still he forced himself to wait a second longer.

"Get out, my pretty lady — get out an' join us," he shouted.

"What have you there?" shouted his comrade.

Then someone started the cry:

"The Queen! It may be the Queen!"

There was a rush towards the carriage. Danbury fired through the bottom — a signal to the driver to dash for it. The horses sprang but were brought back upon their haunches. Beatrice spoke to Danbury.

"Wait. Not yet," she pleaded as he raised his weapon.

It was almost like Providence; a shout from across the street which grew in volume until it drowned out all other cries. Then a rush in that direction which was followed blindly by every man of them. In a few seconds the carriage was deserted. Danbury rose to his feet and looked out. He almost lost his breath as he saw Stubbs, Wilson, and a girl, the center of a thousand excited men. The girl, white-cheeked, turned a moment in his direction. He was dumbfounded. Then he caught the cry, "Down with the traitors!"

The cry was taken up and voiced by a hundred throats. He saw Stubbs thrust his fists in the faces of the crowding men, — saw him fight them back until

his own blood boiled with the desire to stand by his side. But the driver had whipped up the horses again and the carriage was taking him away — out of danger to her. In spite of the look of quick relief he saw in the face of Beatrice, he felt almost like a deserter.

It was what Stubbs took to be a return of the bad luck which had pursued him from childhood — this chance which led the three into the city at such a time as this. They had thought of nothing when they rose early that morning but of pushing through as soon as possible to Bogova. Wilson felt that it was high time that the girl reached civilization even as crude as it was in that city, with some of its comforts. The hardships were beginning to show in her thin cheeks and in dark rings below her eyes. The outskirts of the city told them nothing and so they trudged along with joyous hearts intent only upon finding decent lodgings. They had not even the warning of a shout for what was awaiting them. The upper street had been empty and they had turned sharply into this riot as though it were a trap set to await them.

Both men were quick to understand the situation and both realized that it meant danger. But Stubbs was the first to shake himself free. He recognized the crew at the head of the motley army. It roused his ire as nothing else could. Instantly he felt himself again their master. They were still only so many mutinous sailors. He turned upon them with the same fierceness which once had sent them cowering into the hold.

"Ye yaller dogs," he roared. "Get back! Get back!"

They obeyed — even though they stood at the head of a thousand men, they obeyed. Once these fellows admitted a man their master, he remained so for all time. They shrank before his fists and dodged the muzzle of his revolver as though they were once again within the confines of a ship. In a minute he had cleared a circle.

"Now," shouted Stubbs, "tell 'em we 're through with their two-cent revolution. Tell 'em we 're 'Mericans — jus' plain 'Mericans. Tell 'em thet and thet I 'll put a bullet through the first man that lays a hand on one of us. Splinter, ye blackguard, — tell 'em that! Tell 'em that!"

Through a Carlinian lieutenant who understood English, Splinter made the leaders understand something of what Stubbs had said. They demurred and growled and shouted their protests. But Splinter added a few words of his own and they became quieter.

"Huh?" exploded Stubbs, impatiently; "perhaps some of 'em 'members me. Tell 'em we 're goin' home, an' tell 'em thet when a 'Merican is bound fer home it don't pay fer ter try ter stop him. Tell 'em we ain't goneter wait — we 're goin' now."

He turned to Wilson.

"Come on," he commanded. Throwing up his arms he pressed back the men before him as a policeman brushes aside so many small boys. Whether it was the sheer assurance of the man, whether it was his evi-

dent control over their allies, or whether it was all over before they had time to think, they retreated and left a clear path for him.

"You boys guard our rear," he shouted back to Splinter, "and when we 're outer sight ye can go ter hell."

Obedient to the command, the small band of mercenaries took their place behind the three retreating figures. The latter made their way across the street without hurrying and without sign of fear. They turned a corner and so disappeared from sight. The army paused a moment. Then someone raised a new cry and it moved on, in three minutes forgetting the episode.

Stubbs at the corner found himself in the arms of an excited man, who, revolver in hand, had run back to meet him.

"Lord!" exclaimed Danbury, "I was afraid I was too late."

Without further parley he hurried the girl into the closed carriage and with a yell over his shoulder for the two men to follow, clambered back upon the box.

"The boat 's at the dock," he shouted. "Steam all up. Get on behind!"

The two men had their hands full to keep pace on foot with those wild horses, but the distance was short. In less than an hour the group was all on board the yacht which had her nose pointed straight for the open sea.

CHAPTER XXIX

The Open Door Closes

IT was an excited but happy group of people who sat down that night in the cozy cabin of the yacht after a good day's rest. Each of them had more than he could tell, for no one would allow the other to omit any details of these last adventurous weeks. Each had been held in the clutch of a widely differing set of circumstances and each had been forced to make something of a lone fight of it. Here in the calm and luxury of this cabin their lives, by the grace of God, had come to a focus. First Danbury, as the host, was forced to begin from the time he was lost at the gate to the palace.

He told of how he awoke in a certain house and found himself under the care of the best nurse in the world. But that did n't last long, for the next thing he knew he was on board his yacht and fifty miles out at sea with a mutinous captain — a captain who refused to put back to port when ordered to do so at once. Instead of that, the fellow ran him into a strange port, took on board a surgeon (shanghaied him, in fact) and refused to obey orders until three weeks later Danbury was himself again plus a limp. Then he had come back to Bogova only to be refused permission to anchor in the

harbor. He had come ashore one night in a dory, been arrested and carried before Otaballo who refused to recognize him and gave him the alternative of going to jail or leaving the coast at once. It had all been an incomprehensible mystery to him; the only explanation he could think of being that the Queen was seized by the General who had usurped the throne. He tried once more to land and this time learned of the movement afoot by the Republican party. He had made a dash for the palace, forced his way through the guards, and reached the Queen. Now he 'd like an explanation from her Majesty of the unfair advantage she had taken of a wounded prisoner.

Her Majesty with an excited, happy laugh said that if boys would get excited and act foolishly, the only thing to do was to keep them out of trouble by force. It was true that she had conspired to have him transported and kept safe aboard his ship, because she knew that if he came back, he would resent a great many things she was forced to bear as a matter of diplomacy, and would end by getting stabbed in the back. She thought it was better to have a live lover, even though he were a hundred miles away, than a dead soldier. He scowled in disgust, but she reached his hand under the table. She had given orders to Otaballo and then she had lain awake all night crying because he had carried them out. Her plan had been to get the kingdom all straightened out and at peace, and then to abdicate. But things had gone wrong and she told them a story of plots and counterplots, of strange men arrested at

her very door with knives in their hands, of a bomb found in the palace, that held them breathless. Danbury fairly boiled over with excitement.

"And you had me tied up while those things were going on? Trix — I 'll never forgive you. I might have been a regular story-book hero."

"Not in Carlina; you 'd have been killed before night."

"Rot! Don't you think I 'm old enough to take care of myself?"

"No," she answered. "And that 's why I 've come with you."

"I 'd have cleared up that trouble in a week," he exploded. "And as for those beggars of mine — do you know I risked my life to get their pay to them through an agent? And then they turned against us."

"Still for pay," she said.

"Well, their life will be a short one and a merry in that crowd. Once the darned republic is running again, they will be got rid of."

If Danbury squirmed at having missed the excitement at Bogova, he fairly writhed with envy of Stubbs and Wilson. As he listened he hitched back and forth in his chair, leaned over the table until he threatened to sprawl among the glasses, and groaned jealously at every crisis. Wilson told his story as simply as possible from its beginning; the scenes at the house, his finding the map, his adventures in Bogova, the long trip to the cave, his danger there, and their dash back with the treasure, omitting, however, the story of the Priest's

relation to the girl as of too personal a nature. At this point the black coffee was brought on, the steward dismissed, and as a climax to the narrative the contents of the twenty bags of jewels poured out upon the table. They made a living, sparkling heap that held everyone of them in silent wonder. Beneath the electric lights, they took on their brightest hues, darting rays in all directions, a dazzling collection which in value and beauty was greater than any which has ever been gathered at one time. To-day they are scattered all over the world. There is not a collection in Europe which is not the richer for one or more of them. They flash upon the fingers of royalty, they sparkle upon the bosom of our own richest, they are locked tight in the heavy safes of London Jews, and at least four of them the Rajah of Lamar ranks among the choicest of what is called the most magnificent collection in the world. But the two finest of them all, neither the money of Jews nor the influence of royalty was powerful enough to secure; one came as a wedding gift to Mrs. Danbury, and the other was a gift from Stubbs to Jo.

For a few minutes they lay there together, as for so long they had lain in the cave — a coruscating fortune of many millions.

"Well," gasped Danbury, "you fellows certainly got all the fun and a good share of the profit out of this trip. But — did you say you left a pile behind?"

"In gold. Twenty times what these are worth," said Wilson.

"And you could locate it again?"

"It's buried under a mountain now, but you're welcome to the map if you wish to dig for it. I don't want any more of it. I found what I was after."

He looked at Jo who had become as silent as ever the wife of Flores was. She had learned the same trick of the eyes — a sort of sheep-like content.

"But, Stubbs," broke out Danbury, "will *you* go back with me? We'll take dynamite and men enough to blow out the whole mountain. Say, it will be bully and ——"

He felt warm fingers close over his own. It sent a thrill the length of him, but also it told him that things were different now — that he must not plan for himself alone.

"Well," he added slowly, "perhaps some day we can go — say ten years from now. Are you with me, Stubbs?"

"It's good enough to stow erway ter dream about," smiled Stubbs, catching a warning glance from Beatrice, "but as fer me, I h'ain't gut th' taste of rope outer my mouth yet."

They swept back the jewels into the bags and locked them up in Danbury's safe. The latter agreed to take them to New York and see that they were properly appraised so that a fair division could be made. Stubbs protested that it was n't worth while.

"Jus' give me one bag of 'em an' I guess thet will last me out."

But Wilson insisted on the literal carrying out of their bargain, share and share alike.

The remainder of the trip was a sort of extra honeymoon for Danbury and Wilson, while Stubbs was content to act as chaperone and bask in the reflected happiness about him. The climax came with the double wedding held on board the ship in Boston Harbor just as soon as they could get a parson on board. The little cabin was a bower of flowers and what the two girls lacked in gowns (both Danbury and Wilson insisting that to prepare a trousseau was a wholly unnecessary waste of time) they made up in jewels. The dinner which followed was worthy of the Astoria, for Togo, the Japaneses steward, was given carte blanche.

Stubbs was to go on to New York with Danbury, but as to where he should go from there, he was mysterious.

"There 's a widder at Lisbon ——" he hinted to Wilson.

"If you don't find her, come back to us."

"Maybe so; maybe so. It 's God bless ye both, anyhow, an' perhaps we 'll meet in the end at the Home port."

. . . . . .

From the dark of their unlighted room in the hotel Wilson and his wife stood side by side staring down at the interminable procession of shuffling feet in which, so short a time ago, they had been two units. It had been just such a dusk time as this when she had first got a glimpse of this man by her side. The world had seemed very big and formidable to her then

and yet she had felt something of the tingling romance of it. Now as she gazed down through the misting rain at the glazed streets and the shadows moving through the paths of yellow lights from the windows, she felt a yearning to be a part of them once more.

Once again she felt the gypsy call of things beyond; once again she vibrated atune to the mystic song of the dark. She felt stifled in here with her love. For the moment she was even rebellious. After the sweep of sky-piercing summits, after the unmeasured miles of the sea, there was not room here for a heart so big as hers. Somehow this room seemed to shut out the sky. She wanted to go down into the crowd for a little and brush shoulders with these restless people. It would seem a little less as though she had been imprisoned.

It seemed to her as though she would then be more completely alone with him — alone as they were those first few hours when they had felt the press of the world against them. For this night of nights, she craved the isolation which had once been thrust upon them. They were such guarded creatures here. An hundred servants hedged them about, — hedged them in as zealously as jailers. The law — that old enemy — patroled the streets now to keep them safe where once it had thrust them out into the larger universe. Outside still lay the broad avenues of dark where one heard strange passings; where one was in touch with the ungoverned. The rain sifted gently from the uncharted regions above. It was there lovers

should be — there where one could swing the shoulders and breathe deeply.

The girl snuggled uneasily closer to his side. The two pressed to the window as though to get as far away as possible from all the man-made furnishings about them.

"Jo," he whispered, "we ought n't to be shut in."

She found his hand and grasped it with the strength of one who thrills with the deeper understanding. She trembled in the grip of that love which, at least once in a woman's life, lifts her to a higher plane than can be reached outside a madhouse. She felt a majestic scorn of circumstance. She was one with Nature herself, — she and her man. She laid her hot cheek against his heart. She had not yet been kissed, withdrawing from his lips half afraid of the dizzy heights to which they beckoned.

"Let 's get back into the dark, Jo," he whispered again, drawing her towards him; "back where I found you, Jo. I want to get outside once more — with you. I want to be all alone with you once more."

"David! David!" she cried joyously, "I know."

"I don't want to start life with you from here. I want to start from where we stood before the fire all wet. It was there I found you."

"Yes! Yes!" she answered, scarcely able to get her breath.

"It was meant for us to begin there. We were turned aside for a little into strange paths, but we 'll go back now. Shall we?"

"Now," she panted. "Let us start now."

"Come," he said.

They hurried out of the room and down the broad marble stairs to the hotel foyer as though fearing something was behind them to seize and hold them prisoner. The smug, well-dressed men and women who were lounging there staring listlessly at the rain, glanced up with a quicker interest in life at sight of their flushed cheeks and eager eyes. They caught in them the living fire which in their own breasts was ash-covered by the years.

The man at the swinging doors straightened at their approach.

"Shall I get you an umbrella, sir?"

"No," answered Wilson, with a smile.

"It is raining hard, sir?"

"Yes, it is raining, thank God."

They moved out upon the steps and the carriage porter put his whistle to his lips. Wilson shook his head and gripped the arm of the excited girl by his side.

"But, sir ——" gasped the porter.

"I 'm afraid you don't belong to the night," said Wilson.

"Lord!" muttered the porter as he saw them step into the wet. "Lord! they 're mad — mad as hatters."

They swung into the damp stream of men and women with a fresh influx of strength. They felt the action of the world — the vibrating pulse of the engines. The Law still stood on the outside like an umpire, but there

were still many forces at work which the Law could not detect, many opportunities for Chance to work, for the quick hand to move stealthily. It was something of this they felt, as they brushed along.

But they wished freer play even than this, — they wished to get where the Law alone stood between them and their ego — and then once more face down the Law. They turned into the big, dripping park with its primeval furnishings of earth and grass and trees and deep shadows. It was amid such surroundings alone that their own big, fundamental emotions found adequate breathing space. They plunged into the silent by-paths as a sun-baked man dives to the sandy bottom of a crystal lake. And into it all they blended as one — each feeling the glory of a perfected whole. Each saw with his own eyes and the eyes of the other, too. It was as though each were given five new senses.

Near one of the large trees a shadow detached itself and stepped towards them. It was a man in a rubber coat and a helmet.

"See," she whispered to him, "it is one of them!"

He saw and the old fighting instinct returned — the old rebellion. But with it came a new responsibility. It was no longer just himself against this thing — no longer the same wild freedom that took no account of consequences.

"See," she trembled. "Shall we run?"

Then she clutched his arm more tightly. There was no need of running now. He was there to face things — to stand firm and batter off.

"Oh, David!" she broke out, "we — we can't run any more."

"No," he answered steadily, "we must go straight ahead and pass him."

So they did, and as the policeman stooped a little the better to see their faces, they each lifted their eyes to him and laughed. He tipped his helmet.

"A bad night, sir," he said genially.

"A bully night," answered Wilson.

They went on more slowly after this, across the park and toward the broad avenue. They came to where the brownstone houses blinked their yellow eyes at them. The boards were all down now and the street all a-twinkle with fairy lights.

"Do you remember how they did that before?" he asked.

"And how warm it looked inside? David — David — they can't make me feel lonesome any more."

"No, but we can't laugh at them; we must laugh with them."

She made up a little face at a big French window which seemed to stare insolently at them.

"We don't need you any more," she said to it.

They came to the only house on the street which was still boarded against the heat of the summer. Here they paused. She seized his arm.

"That is it," she exclaimed. "That is where we began!"

"Yes, but — it looks different, does n't it?"

"It has grown older — more sober."

"Shall we go in?"

She looked up and down the street.

"If only we could get chased — *once* more!"

"We can pretend."

"And go in the back way as we did before?"

"Yes."

"That is good. Come."

She placed her hand within his and they turned down the alley which led to the back street facing the water front. The lights still blinked in the mist — the waves still pounded against the stone walls throwing up salt spray, but they no longer came from out an unfathomable distance. They seemed like very petty waves and the two knew the boundaries, before and back of them, as they had not before.

"Now," she said, "run — run for all you're worth!"

She led the pace, he falling back to keep with her instead of dragging her on. So they ran until they were breathless. Then as before they moved a-tiptoe.

They knew the little door when they reached it.

"I must break it in again," he said.

So she stood back while he threw his weight against it, meeting it with his shoulders. She watched him with a thrill — her heart leaping with every thud of his body against the wood. It was her man forcing a path for her, — her man beating down a barrier. She felt the sting of the wind-driven spray against her cheek, but the depths from which it came no longer called to her. Rather they drove her in. She was con-

tent to be here with her man. Life opened big to her from just where she stood.

The door gave finally, as she knew it must, and hand in hand they entered the paved yard. He fastened the door behind them and yet as he put the joist in place, it was not as it was before. There was no one in pursuit now. She found herself, however, as anxious to see his face and learn what this meant to him as she had been the first time. For after all, even if it were different, it was just as new and unpathed a world they were entering as the other. She took his hand.

"Stoop nearer to me, David."

She saw that his lips were less tense, that there was less of a strain to his shoulders, but that his eyes burned no less brightly.

"Come," she said.

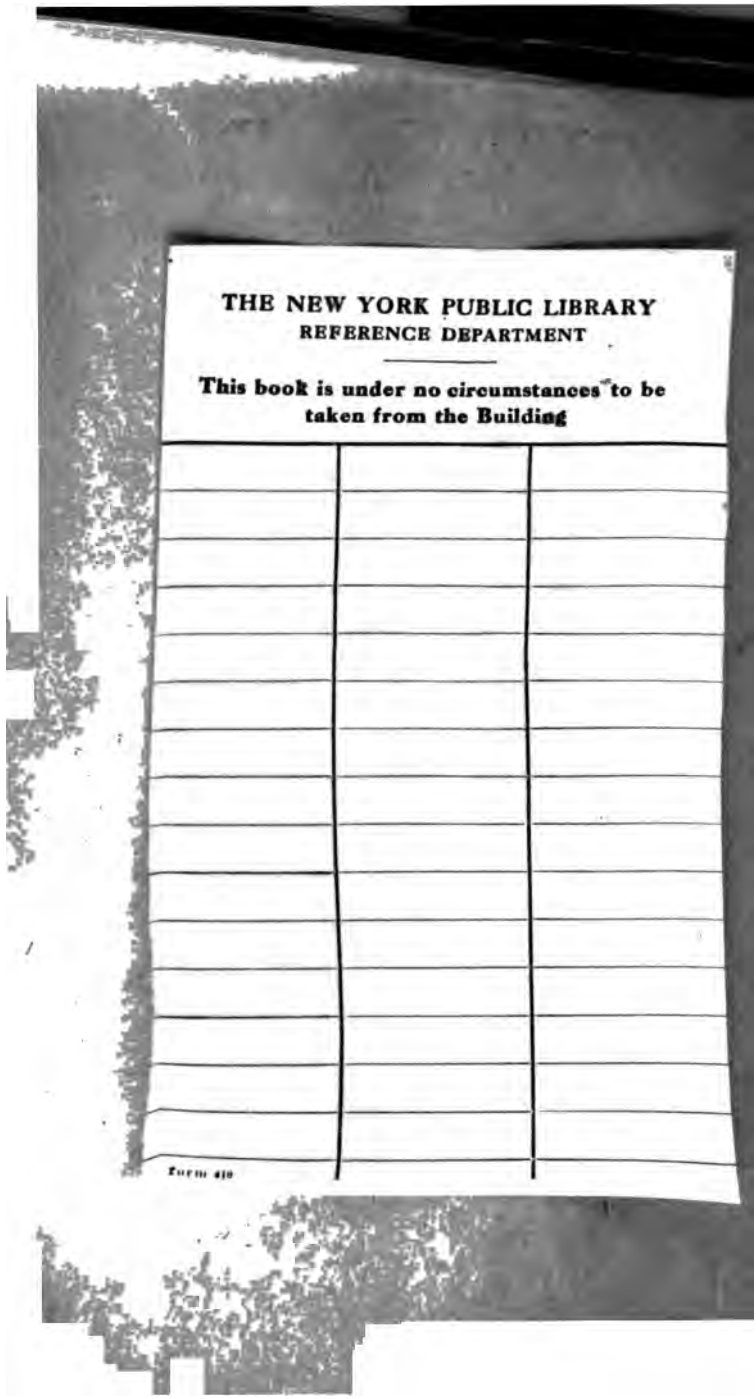
He went in through the window and opened the door for her. The house smelled just as musty as before, but there was less thrill to the dark. They lighted a bit of candle and made their way along the lower hall, up the broad stairs and so into the very room where they had stood a few months before. There were no strange creakings now, no half-guessed movements among the curtains, no swift-gliding shadows more felt than seen. There were no such vast spaces above, and no uncertain alleys of dark. They were among the known things, the certain, the sure.

He found kindling and lighted the fire. It flared up briskly and threw flickering rays into the big room. The two pressed close to it, for their clothes were wet.

Not a thing was altered in the room and yet it was a different room. The room was now a part of this house, the house was part of the street, the street was part of the city, the city part of the man-made world. For a moment the walls pressed in upon them as the hotel walls had done, and the ceilings shut out the stars. Then he turned and met her eyes. They were clear now — unshadowed by doubt, fear, or question. He knew what it meant, — at length she was altogether out of the web. It was odd but he had never kissed her lips. He had waited for this.

She looked up at him and as she looked, she seemed to sink deeper than ever into the golden, misty region which lay below the outer dark of his eyes. She felt a tingling warmth suffuse her whole body; she felt the room about her quicken to new life; and above her head she knew the stars were shining again. She came into his arms putting her hands upon his shoulder, throwing back her head with half-closed eyes. He stooped, his lips brushed her lips; then met firmly in a clinging kiss which set the world about them into a mad riot.

THE END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